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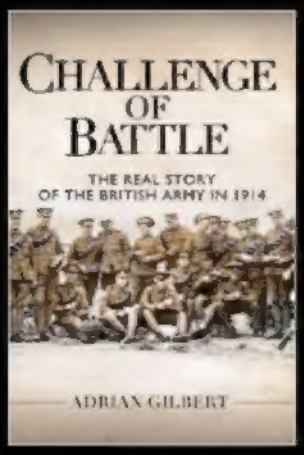

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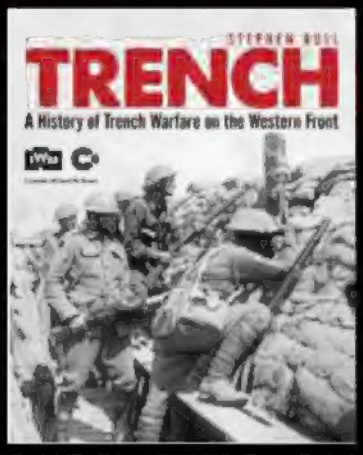

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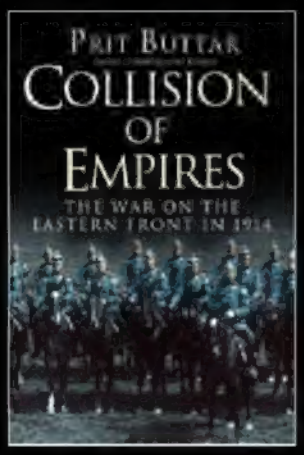

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An in-depth study of the clash between the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian Empires in Eastern Europe, a confrontation that saw some of the most vicious fighting of the first year of the war and would go on to change the face of Europe forever.

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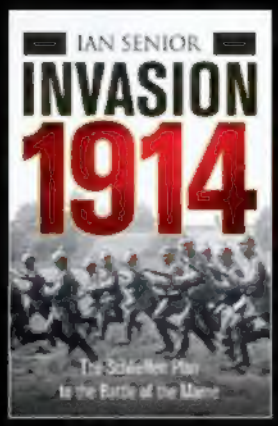

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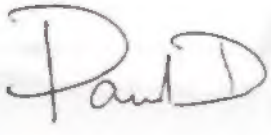
HISTORY of WAR

Welcome

Every war churns up its fair share of characters – some brilliant, some eccentric, some just gung-ho crazy. And the American Civil War was no exception. The conflict threw together some of the greatest minds in military history, who clashed in some of the most iconic battles – names like Gettysburg, Bull Run and Antietam cannot fail to capture the imagination, and even more so because the outcome of that war was so positive for the future of America and humanity in general. Read the whole, colourful story on page 20. And speaking of iconic, this issue we also take a front seat at Agincourt, where Henry V's dogged determination caught the numerically superior French by surprise (page 70), and revisit the tragedy and heroism of the Dunkirk evacuation (page 64), as well as exploring many other fascinating facets of military history. Enjoy!



Paul Dimery *Acting Editor*
team@historyofwar.co.uk

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Contributors

JOHNNY SHARP
Johnny is a freelance history, music and true-crime writer who has written for Mojo, Bizarre and The Guardian. He writes our feature on the American Civil War on p20. "I first studied it at school and it's fascinated me ever since," he says.

DOUG GOODMAN
A travel writer and long-time military-history enthusiast, Doug has spent the past few years researching the life of his uncle, Alec Reader. In this issue, he gives us the full story of this First World War hero who lost his life on the Somme when he was just 18 (p80).

TOM FORDY
Tom is a regular contributor to *The Telegraph*, and an occasional radio personality. His history interests include medieval England, the American Civil War and the Second World War. This issue, he writes about the Northern Ireland Troubles (p48).

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The First Battle of Bull Run, during the American Civil War

Getty Images

ON THE COVER

The American Civil War

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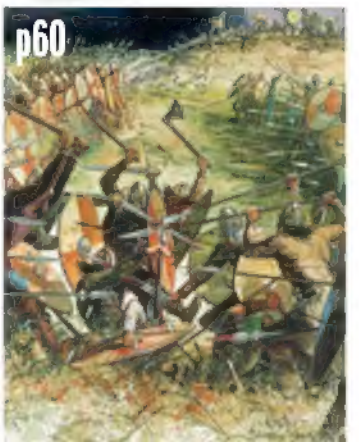

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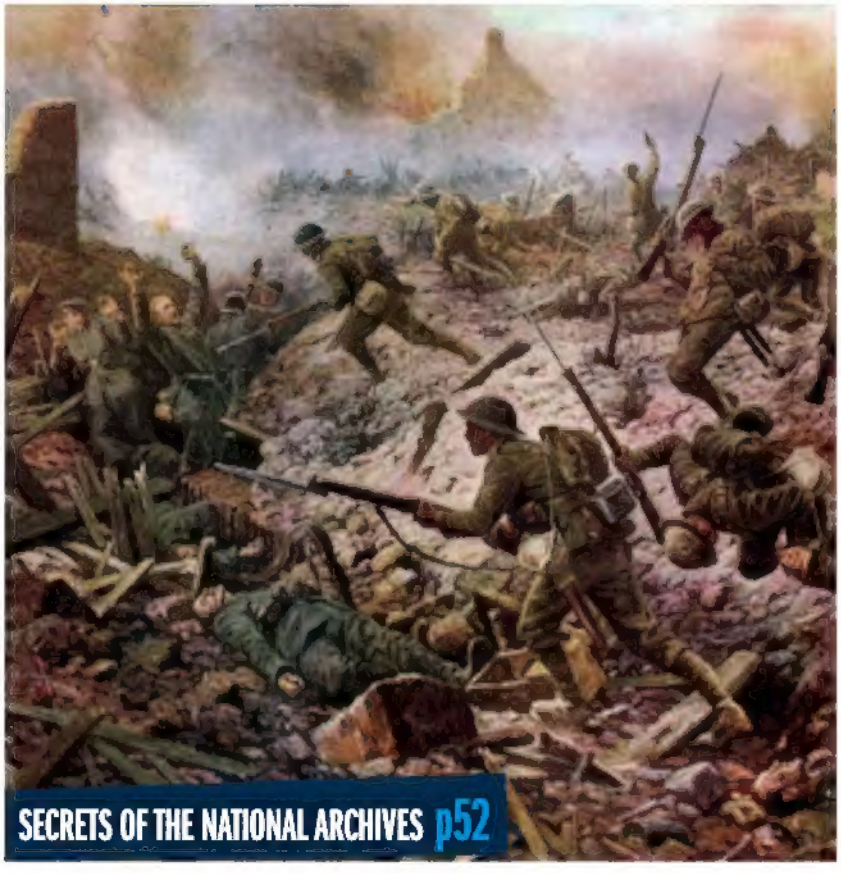

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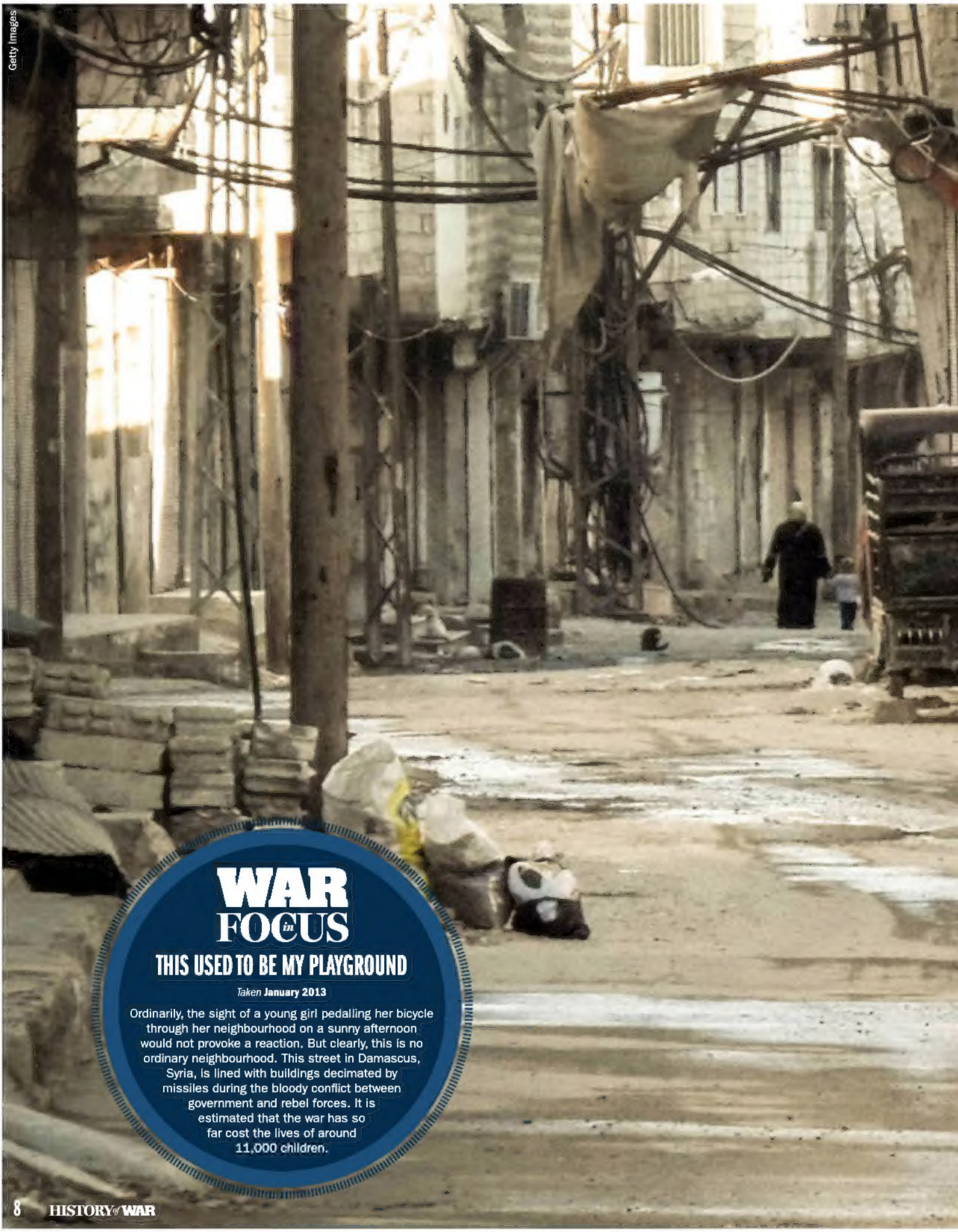
Getty Images

WAR in FOCUS

IN THE DRAGON'S LAIR

Taken **May 1945**

These soldiers must be feeling on top of the world – and not just because of that view. They are American G.I.s and the residence they stand in is The Berghof, home of Adolf Hitler. The chalet in the Bavarian Alps was hit during a bombing campaign by No. 617 Squadron RAF ("The Dam Busters") on 25 April 1945, forcing the SS troops residing there to depart. Hitler himself committed suicide in Berlin five days later.



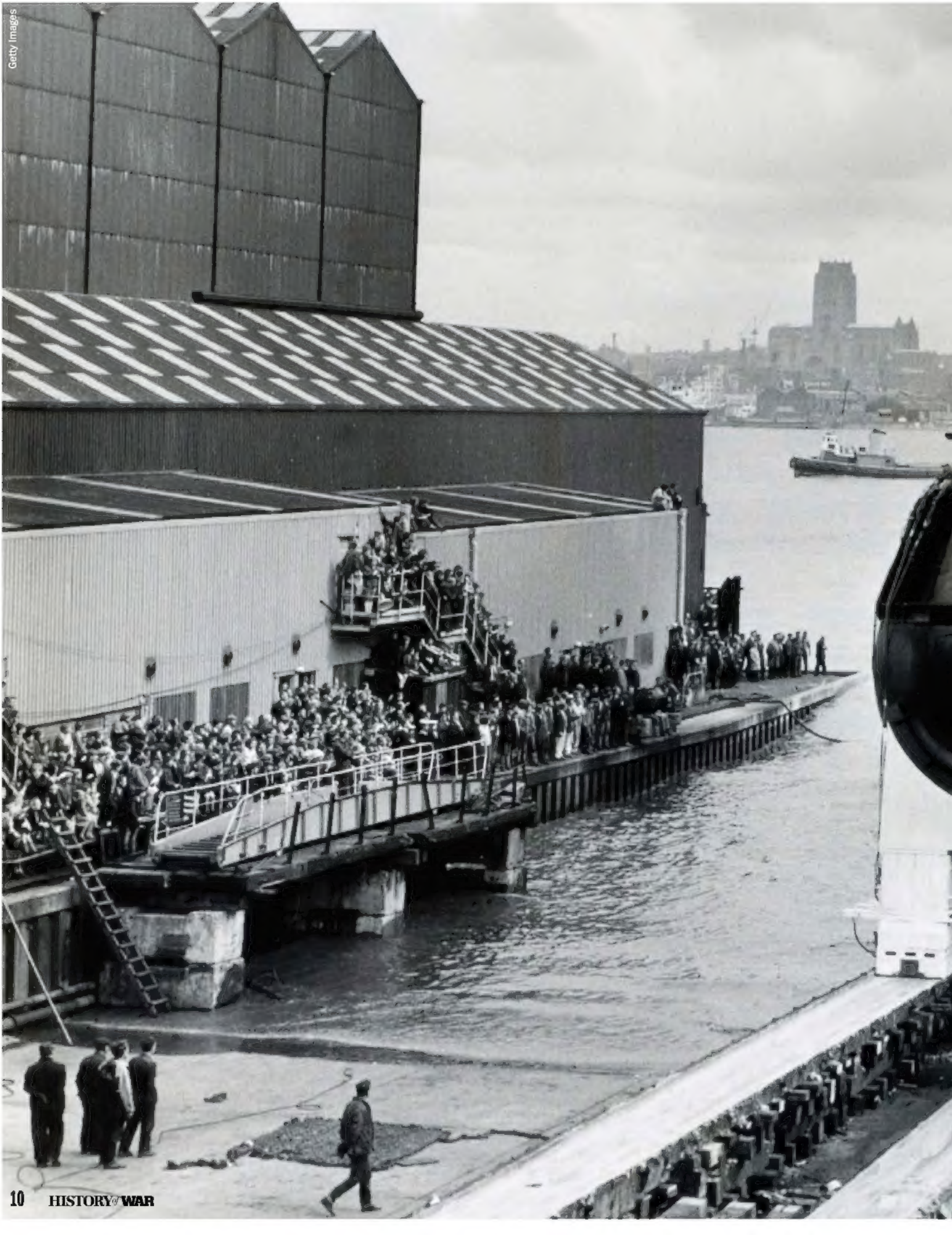
Getty Images

WAR in FOCUS

THIS USED TO BE MY PLAYGROUND

Taken **January 2013**

Ordinarily, the sight of a young girl pedalling her bicycle through her neighbourhood on a sunny afternoon would not provoke a reaction. But clearly, this is no ordinary neighbourhood. This street in Damascus, Syria, is lined with buildings decimated by missiles during the bloody conflict between government and rebel forces. It is estimated that the war has so far cost the lives of around 11,000 children.



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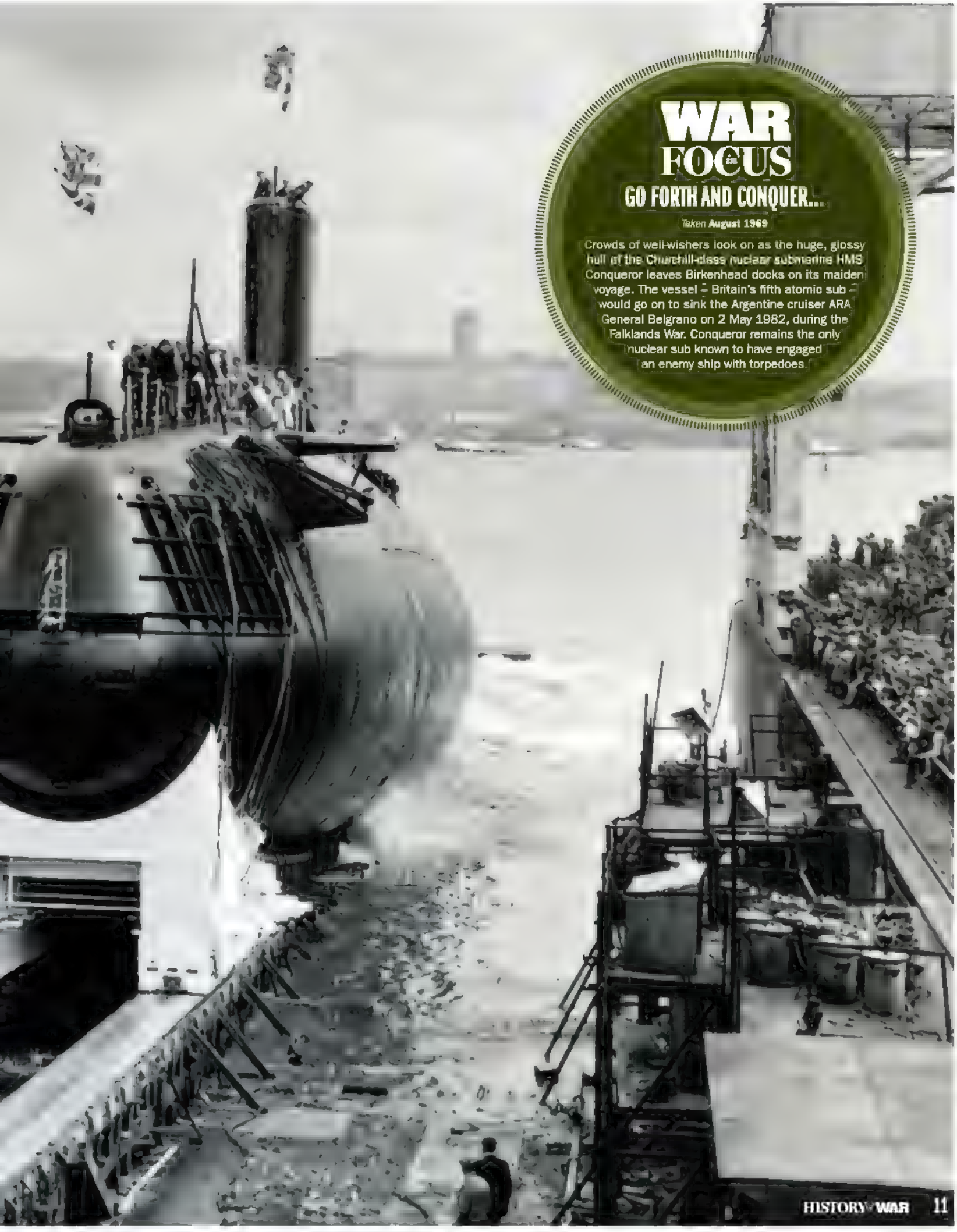


WAR FOCUS

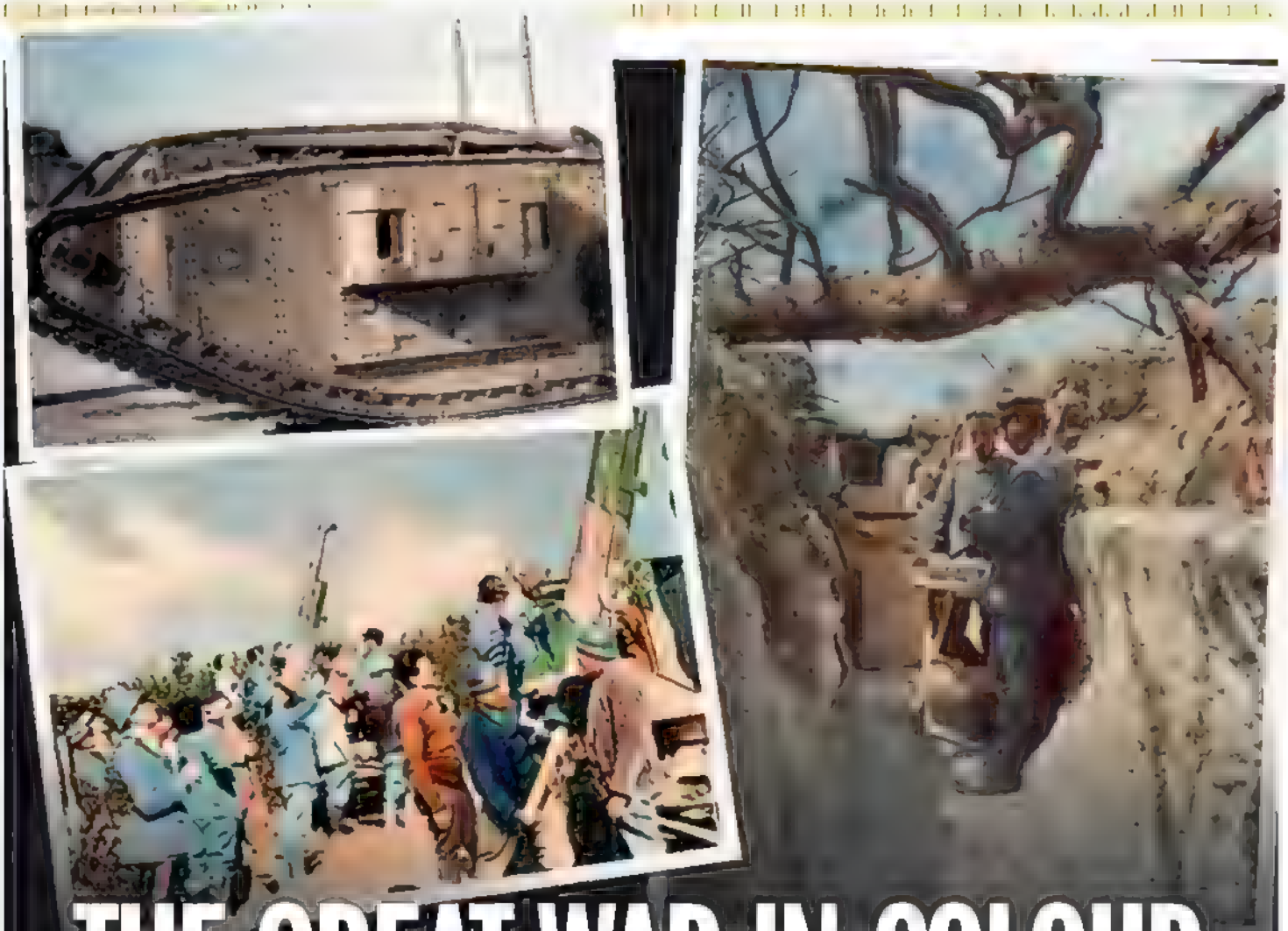
GO FORTH AND CONQUER...

Taken **August 1969**

Crowds of well-wishers look on as the huge, glossy hull of the Churchill-class nuclear submarine HMS Conqueror leaves Birkenhead docks on its maiden voyage. The vessel – Britain's fifth atomic sub – would go on to sink the Argentine cruiser ARA General Belgrano on 2 May 1982, during the Falklands War. Conqueror remains the only nuclear sub known to have engaged an enemy ship with torpedoes.

DISPATCHES

Military news and opinion from around the globe, including the resolution of a long-running WWI mystery, a Korean War photo archive, and Genghis Khan on the big screen…



THE GREAT WAR IN COLOUR

New book affords us a rare glimpse of WWI from a different perspective

As the world commemorates the centenary of the start of the First World War, a stunning new book allows us to discover the conflict from a whole new perspective – namely, full colour.

The First World War in Colour by Peter Walther features more than 320 photos from archives in Europe, the United States and Australia. But what makes these artefacts so special is that the colour hasn't recently been added via Photoshop – the pictures were actually taken that way by a select band of photographers who were pioneering autochrome technology at the time. Esteemed photojournalists including Paul Castelnau, Hans Hildenbrand and Charles C. Zoller spent time on the Western Front capturing everything from Allied and German soldiers relaxing in their respective trenches, through resplendent early warplanes readying for combat in the skies, to scenes of devastation in the towns and villages of northern France and Belgium. The only thing missing is footage of the action itself – the long exposure time of autochrome technology meant that spontaneity was impossible to capture properly.

THE PICTURES WERE TAKEN BY A SELECT BAND OF PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO WERE PIONEERING AUTOCHROME TECHNOLOGY

The First World War in Colour, published by Taschen, is available now, RRP £34.99

GERMANY MUST APOLOGISE FOR ITS ROLE IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Campaigners in Spain insist Germans are in "debt" to victims of General Franco

It may have officially ended 75 years ago, but the pain caused by the Spanish Civil War lives on in the hearts and minds of many Spanish people. One group has written to German Chancellor Angela Merkel demanding that she apologise for her country's siding with Nationalist leader Francisco Franco during the conflict.

The Association for Recovering Historical Memory (ARHM) saw Merkel's recent visit to Spain, where she was meeting Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, as a good opportunity for the leader to make amends for Germany's involvement in the 1936-39 conflict. Referring to the German contingent sent by Hitler to back Franco's uprising against Spain's Republican government, they wrote her a letter asking her to "settle the historical debt for the crimes of the Condor Legion. The country you lead has an enormous debt to the victims of the Franco dictatorship."

The Condor Legion's terror-bombing campaigns, which included the destruction of the Basque town of Guernica in 1937, helped Franco to win the war.

Campaigners insist that Germany still owes a debt for the bombing of Guernica by the Condor Legion

THAT'S MY GRANDFATHER!

LANCASHIRE WOMAN RECOGNISES RELATIVE IN PROPAGANDA PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR, SOLVING A MYSTERY THAT'S BEEN BAFFLING ARCHIVISTS FOR DECADES

It's one of the most iconic photographs of the First World War, and yet the identities of the men in it have never come to light – until now.

Sylvia Nichol of Carnforth, Lancashire, spotted the picture, *Tommy At Home In German Dug-outs* (which was used as a propaganda poster by the Ministry of Information during the Great War) during the recent centenary commemorations. Her eyes lit up when she realised that the man to the far left of the picture was her grandfather, Sergeant Norman Park. She was then able to identify the other men in the picture, who were all from the Border Regiment – they are (from left) Lance Corporal Tattersall, Dan Daly and E. Carradice. In doing so, she solved a mystery that had frustrated historians for many years.

"I sort of knew about the photo years ago before I ever saw a copy," says Mrs Nichol. "My dad told the tale of when he came home on leave in the Second World War from Belgium or Germany. He got off the train at Euston station and looking out at him from a poster on the wall was his old man."

Mrs Nichol believes the photograph was taken on the Somme in July 1916, although the Imperial War Museum dates it a month later. Sergeant Park was sent home as an invalid after being poisoned by gas. "He often lamented that he had an easy way out of the war," reveals Mrs Nichol

News in Brief

WAR MEMORIAL SILENCED BY PREMIER INN

England's tallest war memorial has been silenced after an appeal by the Premier Inn group. The Nicholson memorial clock in Leek, Staffordshire (below), which was unveiled in 1925, has traditionally sounded off every 15 minutes from 6.15am. But now, its first toll of the day has been put back to 8.15am to enable guests at the nearby Premier Inn to get a good night's sleep!

WWII PLAQUE LEFT TO "ROT"

Stevenage Borough Council has been criticised for allowing a WWII memorial plaque to "rot". A local man, Andy Curtis – whose grandfather served as a member of the Hertfordshire Yeomanry Division during the conflict – complained to the Council, saying, "I think it's absolutely disgusting. So many people don't even know where this plaque is." A spokesman for the Council has said that they are looking into resolving the matter.

WILFRED OWEN HONOURED AT EDINBURGH SCHOOL

A school in Edinburgh has unveiled a plaque of Wilfred Owen. The WWI poet taught English Literature at Tynecastle High School while recovering from shell shock suffered at Savy Wood in northern France. He is one of 11 figures celebrated in a new Historic Scotland scheme. Owen was later killed in battle, just days before the armistice.

GENGHIS KHAN: THE MOVIE

Genghis Khan is the subject of a new 3D action film, which will hit cinemas in 2016. Producer Avi Arad has promised that the movie – working title *Genghis's Treasure* – will be an epic on a par with *Braveheart*. "It will feature profound cultural depths and bring the essence of Chinese civilisation to people around the world," said director Lisi Mai.

Events

▶ 12 OCTOBER

Memoirs of an Infantry Officer: Paul Hogarth Illustrates Siegfried Sassoon

Today is the last chance to see this exhibition of Paul Hogarth's arresting illustrations for Siegfried Sassoon's renowned set of memoirs at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

www.vam.ac.uk

▶ 10-14 OCTOBER

All Our Yesterdays

Dress up in vintage costume and come and celebrate the sounds and sights of the past, from 1914-45.

Pinxton Village Hall, Derbyshire.

www.pickering-warweekend.co.uk

▶ 2 NOVEMBER

Northern Military Expo

Indoor event with stalls selling everything from medals to manuals, vehicles to costumes.

Newark Showground, Nottinghamshire.

01302 739000;

www.northernmilitaryexpo.co.uk

▶ 16 NOVEMBER

Malvern Militaria Fair

With more than 240 stalls, there is sure to be something for everyone.

Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire.

01743 762266

www.militariashows.com

AND DON'T FORGET THESE EVENTS LATER NEXT YEAR...

▶ 25 JANUARY 2015

Militaria

Calling itself Europe's premier militaria show is no small claim, but there is a plethora of things to do at these events, from vehicle displays to stalls and more. Stoneleigh Park, Coventry, Warwickshire.

www.militariashows.com

▶ 22-26 JULY 2015

The War and Peace Revival

Book your tickets for one of Britain's most popular military events.

RAF Westenhanger, Folkestone Racecourse, near Hythe, Kent.

OUR BOYS IN THE TRENCHES

History-mad brothers replicate WWI battlefield in their back garden

Most young boys like to play war games in their spare time, but there can't be many out there who take them as seriously as the Harvey brothers from Norwich. They've built a replica First World War battlefield in the back garden of their parents' house!

Inspired by a recent visit to the Muckleburgh Military Collection at Weybourne, Norfolk – not to mention the centenary commemorations for the Great War – Ethan, 14, and Reuben, 11, decided to re-create the battlefield experience

"SOME OF THE YOUNGEST SOLDIERS WERE MY AGE, SO IT'S SCARY TO THINK THAT COULD'VE BEEN ME"

at their own home. With their parents' permission, they dug a trench 8ft long and 4ft deep, and complemented it with a lookout tower, "tank traps" draped in fake barbed wire, a pillbox guard post and even a tunnel. To round it all off, there's a memorial to those who fell in places like Flanders and the Somme, around which the brothers have planted poppies.

"Reuben and I wanted to commemorate what happened 100 years ago as a tribute to those who made the sacrifice," said Ethan, whose great-great-grandfather Frank Williams fought at the 1914 Battle of Mons – the BEF's first major action of WWI – with the 15th Royal Hussars. "Some of the youngest soldiers were about my age, so it's scary to think that could've been me – I don't know how I would've coped."

The boys regularly dress up in World War One uniform to play in their "battlefield", and have invited schoolfriends to their house to give them an historical tour.

"I've learnt a lot about the war through this, and it helps me explain to my friends what happened," continues Ethan.

Vietnam vets still suffering from PTSD

Eleven per cent of the US soldiers who fought in South-East Asia have still not recovered

They say there was no real winner in the Vietnam War, and for many the battle is still going on. Scientists believe that more than 283,000 US veterans are still suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following their experiences in the South-East Asia conflict.

Around 30 per cent of the 8.3 million personnel involved in Vietnam went on to develop PTSD, and a recent study funded by the US Department of Veterans Affairs revealed that 11 per cent still suffer from it. Symptoms of the disorder include nightmares, intrusive memories, isolation, depression and anxiety.

"The study's key takeaway is that for some people, post-traumatic stress disorder is just not going away," commented William Schlenger, one of the scientists who conducted the study. "It is chronic and prolonged. And for veterans with PTSD, the war is not over."

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PENSIONER STARTS KOREAN WAR PHOTO VENTURE

A new project aims to connect Korean War veterans and their families via photographs taken during the conflict

Snapshots From The Korean War was launched by Betty Perkins-Carpenter, an 83-year-old US Air Force veteran from New York. For many years, Betty – a member of the Korean War Veterans Association – has had in her possession 138 snapshots that were taken by the Defence Department to document the first few months of the conflict. They were given to her by a woman called Brenda Clattenburg, who discovered them in her deceased father's personal effects.

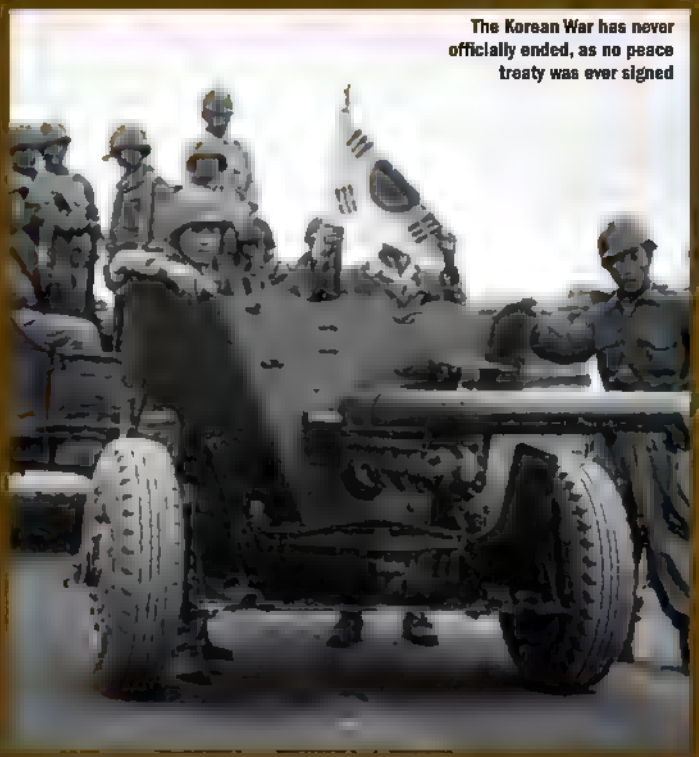
Now, Perkins-Carpenter is hoping that the photographs – which have been digitally scanned and uploaded to her website, together with caption information – will provide a useful history resource for fellow veterans, their families and other interested parties.

"The thing about these pictures is that [they were taken] when most of our men were killed, right there at the beginning of the war," says Perkins-Carpenter. "It's so important to get these out. Some people spend a whole lifetime trying to find out what happened to [the members of] their families."

The ultimate goal of the project is that all the photographs will find their way to people who have a connection with them.

To view them for yourself, visit the website at **www.koreanwar.democratandchronicle.com**

"IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO GET THESE OUT. SOME PEOPLE HAVE SPENT A LIFETIME TRYING TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THEIR FAMILIES"



The Korean War has never officially ended, as no peace treaty was ever signed

HISTORY FANS FLOCK NORTH TO SEE RARE ROMAN RELIC

A rare shield boss is the star attraction at a new exhibition of Roman artefacts in South Shields.

The item was discovered in 1866 during a dredging operation at the mouth of the River Tyne, and is believed to have been on a ship that sank in around 180AD but has never been found.

A boss, found at the centre of a shield, would have protected the soldier's hand during battle. Amazingly, thanks to an inscription on the item, historians have been able to work out exactly who the soldier in question was – Roman legionary Junius Dubitatus.

Alex Croom, keeper of archaeology at Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums explains: "Soldiers had to buy their own weapons, and it must have cost him quite a lot of money, as it was coated in silver. Thankfully for us, he punched his name in the metal, and also that he was under the command of Julius Magnus."

The boss, believed to be the only complete item of its kind in the world, will be on display along with numerous other artefacts at The Glory of Rome: Arbeia's Greatest Treasures exhibition at Arbeia Roman Fort, South Shields, until December.

How donkeys helped the 1914 war effort

Irish auction raised funds for Belgian refugees

You've heard of war horses, but how about war donkeys? It's unlikely you would've seen such an animal on the dangerous battlefields of northern Europe during WWI, but it transpires that donkeys did actually play a big part in the Allied war effort.

According to a document very recently uncovered by the Public Record Office in Northern Ireland (PRONI), a donkey auction took place in Bangor, Co. Down, in November 1914, with all proceeds given to the Belgium Relief Fund. The charity was set up to provide food for the Belgian people during the German occupation. Many suffered from starvation, which was plainly evident to the Irish when hundreds of Belgians arrived after the outbreak of war.

Alyson Stanford of PRONI explains: "It's amazing to find that such charitable actions were being made by local people, with all kinds of items, and animals, up for auction."

USS Houston's wreck discovered after 72 years

Cruiser was sunk by Japanese warships in 1942

She was the pride of the US Navy until she was sunk by the Japanese during the Battle of Sunda Strait in February 1942, and since then the exact whereabouts of USS Houston's wreck has been unknown.

But now, 72 years on, US and Indonesian Navy divers have located the heavy cruiser on the seabed off the coast of Java, Indonesia. The wreck was found to be missing its hull rivets, a metal plate and unexploded ordnance. There was also oil seeping from the hull.

The Houston, nicknamed "The Galloping Ghost", was launched in 1929 and was seen as one of the US Navy's most powerful ships. She was one of the 14 vessels deployed to the Java Sea to take on the 17-strong Japanese Navy, but was hit by torpedoes and sunk. Of the 1,061 crew, only 368 survived.

"In my discussions with our Indonesian Navy partners, they share our sense of obligation to protect this site," said US Pacific Fleet commander Admiral Harry Harris. "Surveying the site was only the first step in partnering to respect those sailors who made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure the freedoms and security that we richly enjoy today."

BRITISH BOMB BLOWS 65FT HOLE IN GERMAN AUTOBAHN

The next time you dig a hole, beware: you might just unearth an unexploded bomb! That's what happened to construction workers near Frankfurt when they found a 1,000-pound bomb underneath one of Germany's busiest autobahns.

Bomb disposal experts were rushed to the scene and had to secure the device with chemicals, so they were forced into a controlled explosion. The detonation ripped a hole 65-feet wide and three-feet deep in Autobahn 3, causing 12 miles of traffic jams in both directions.

UNDER THE HAMMER

Auction bidders dig deep for sought-after wartime memorabilia

One of the largest private collections of American Civil War memorabilia was sold off at Johnson Properties in Angier, New Carolina, last month. The late Cotton Reynolds had spent his life collecting the artefacts, which included everything from a sword owned by Georgia Confederate officer W. J. McElroy, which sold for $3,250 (£2,000), to a collection of clothing and equipment that belonged to Union naval Captain William Turner, which fetched $4,700 (£2,900). But the highest bid was for a rare collection of John Primble pocket knives, sold for $7,500 (£4,600). "To Daddy, it was all valuable," said Reynolds' daughter, JoAnne. "He'd say even a $50 piece had a $500 story behind it."

Charles Johnson Payne, or Snaffles, was one of Britain's greatest-ever equestrian artists – but during WWI, he served as a gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery and doubled up as a war artist, contributing to periodicals including *The Graphic*. As *History of War* goes to press, a number of his works are due to be auctioned at Moore Allen & Innocent in Cirencester. These include *The Gunner* (pictured), which is expected to fetch between £800 and £1,200. The painting depicts a pipe-smoking artillery officer looking up towards a biplane and exclaiming, "Good hunting! Old sportsman."

The medals of one of Kettering's greatest airmen were sold to a mystery bidder for £72,000 at London auctioneers Spink last month. Air Commodore Edward "Daisy" Sismore flew his Mosquito in some of the most daring raids of the Second World War, including the Amiens Jail Raid on 19 August 1944, and the last of the "Mosquito Daylight Spectaculars" on the Gestapo headquarters in Aarhus, Copenhagen and Odense. He was 21 when he received the Distinguished Service Order and the Distinguished Flying Cross, and went on to receive nine further honours before retiring in 1976.

HISTORY OF WAR

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
+44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
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www.historyofwar.co.uk

Magazine team

Editor in Chief James Hoare
Production Editor Tim Williamson
01202 586 200
Photographer James Sheppard
Senior Art Editor Helen Harris
Publishing Director Aaron Asadi
Head of Design Ross Andrews

Contributors
Mark Bryant, Tom Fordy, Adrian Gilbert, Doug Goodman, Steve Jarratt, Paul Pettengale, Johnny Sharp, Kai Wood, Paul Dimery (Acting Editor for Anthem)

Images
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Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Head of Sales Hang Deretz
01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Accounts Manager Jennifer Galvin
01202 586431
jennifer.galvin@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Accounts Manager Lee Mussell
01202 586424
lee.mussell@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Sales Executive Luke Biddiscombe
01202 586431
luke.biddiscombe@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
History of War is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
+44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
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Head of Subscriptions Sharon Todd
subscriptions@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Circulation
Head of Circulation Darren Pearce
01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
01202 586200

Founders
Group Managing Director Damian Butt
Group Finance and Commercial Director Steven Boyd

Printing & Distribution
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TILL DEATH DO US PART

WWII veteran and his wife die within hours of each other on their wedding anniversary

Clifford Hartland, a soldier with the 7th Coast Regiment Royal Artillery, was captured by the Japanese in 1942 and worked half to death building the Burma Railway. But he survived – and that may have been down to the love he had for the woman he'd married three years previously.

That woman's name was Marjorie, and the couple would be inseparable for the rest of their lives. When Clifford passed away in July – after 76 years of marriage – his wife died of a broken heart just hours later. And what makes the story even more remarkable is that they both died on the exact date they'd got married.

Clifford was posted to Singapore as a gunner in 1941. The following year, his regiment surrendered to the Japanese, whereupon they were forced to work on the railway line that stretched 250 miles to the Thai border. Clifford was one of only four men from his regiment who survived the ordeal and lived to see the end of the war, at which point he was returned home to Cardiff to a hero's welcome.

"[After Dad died] Mum just kept saying, 'I can't live without him,'" said their daughter, Christine Pearson. "That night, Mum rang me. She was upset and I told her to think about all the happy times they'd shared while she drifted off to sleep. She died at 1am, and I like to think that's what she was doing."

CLIFFORD WAS ONE OF ONLY FOUR MEN FROM HIS REGIMENT WHO SURVIVED THE ORDEAL AND LIVED TO SEE THE END OF THE WAR

American Civil War officer to receive Medal of Honor – 151 years after his death

When First Lieutenant Alonzo H. Cushing lost his life fighting for the Union Army at the Battle of Gettysburg, the 16th US President, Abraham Lincoln, was in power. Little could Cushing have imagined that he would one day receive a Medal of Honor from the 44th President!

This much-belated awarding of America's highest military accolade is unprecedented, since recommendations usually have to be made within two years of the act of heroism. It was only after Congress granted a special exemption that the medal could be handed over to Cushing's estate by Barack Obama.

Cushing commanded around 110 men and six cannons at Gettysburg, defending Cemetery Ridge against Pickett's Charge, a Confederate thrust involving some 13,000 men. Despite receiving a bullet wound to the head, he refused to withdraw and ordered his men to fight on. The Confederate Army lost at Gettysburg, a result that swung the tide of the Civil War.

"Refusing to evacuate to the rear despite his severe wounds, [Cushing] directed the operation of his lone field piece, continuing to fire in the face of the enemy," the White House said. "His actions made it possible for the Union Army to successfully repulse the Confederate assault."

LETTERS

Make your thoughts and opinions known by writing to *History Of War*.
Email **team@historyofwar.co.uk** or send letters to...
History Of War, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EZ

WAR IS NO GAME

Firstly, may I congratulate you on your wonderful magazine. I look forward to receiving every issue through my letterbox!

I am a great admirer of Professor Niall Ferguson, but sometimes I feel that he has some sort of brain freeze. His argument for teaching schoolchildren about the First World War through a computer game (Dispatches, issue six) seems incredibly naïve to me. In my experience, through watching my son and stepson playing war and conflict games, they cheapen reality. Their concept of destruction and "death" is very unreal. If a mistake is made, it's simply a case of, "Oh well, I'll start again." Learning about the Great War in this way would not give depth to the massive loss and horror suffered during the conflict.

> "Learning about the Great War in this way would not give depth to the massive loss and horror suffered during the conflict"

So I agree with Kate Adie on this point – war is not a game! Yes, today's generation need to know what this conflict was about, but a war game would do the opposite of what Professor Ferguson wishes to achieve. It would turn the "war to end all wars" into a gimmick-filled disc alongside some *Alien Destruction* adventure!

Phil Roberts *via iPad*

NORWEGIAN DEFIANCE

So far, your Second World War articles have been excellent – I particularly enjoyed the Stalingrad feature in issue seven – but there's one area that I'd like to find out more about, and that's the Norwegian resistance movement. Most people are aware of it to some degree, thanks to the rather poor Kirk Douglas film *The Heroes Of Telemark*. And, while denying the Nazis access to heavy water and halting their deuterium oxide program is a fascinating story, what was going on day to day in the cities sounds equally interesting. Ben Macintyre touched on it in his book *Agent Zigzag*, about how the Norwegians were openly defiant to the Nazis, and the general population seemed fearless in the face of occupation – would one of your writers be able to dig out the full story?

Steve Cullimore *Bromley*

> "I believe it's our duty to keep the heroic and courageous actions of these great men alive"

NEVER FORGOTTEN

The recent commemorations for the fallen in the Great War were heartwarming to see. Too often, we hear about young people not respecting older generations, but numerous children and teenagers in my town took part in the memorial services that happened here, and some even organised activities that raised money for ex servicemen.

My grandfather fought at Ypres during the 1914-18 conflict, and such were the horrors he witnessed, he never wished to speak about his experiences when he returned home. But while those who fought may have wished to forget, I believe it's our duty to keep the heroic and courageous actions of these great men alive. I just hope that our ancestors take part in similar commemorations in a hundred years' time.

Ann Loveridge *Fairfield*

A REAL EYE-OPENER

Even though it was a distressing read at times, I was very grateful for your in-depth article on the Congo ("War In The Congo", issue seven). I imagine a lot of people, perfectly understandably, assume that the conflict began and ended with the Rwandan genocide, as so little of what happened after that time gained much traction in mainstream news reporting. And, like Nick Soldinger said, the seeds of the conflict were rooted in colonialism, which is something those who were complicit in the actions would like brushed under the carpet.

James Pligh *via email*

> "A lot of people, perfectly understandably, assume that the conflict began and ended with the Rwandan genocide"

Getty Images

All images: Getty Images
(unless otherwise credited)

...n General Philip Kearny charges ...t the Battle of Chantilly, 1862. The concluding battle of the Northern Virginia Campaign resulted in a Confederate victory for the Confederacy, with Kearny among those who lost their lives

THE American CIVIL WAR

United States of America? Between 1861 and 1865, they were anything but, as conflicting opinions on slavery led to secession, political strife and, ultimately, bloody conflict

When people talk about "the South" in America, the states they refer to often seem to bear little relation to geography. You might ask: Why aren't they talking about California, even though it borders Mexico? Or Arizona? Or New Mexico? And what makes Virginia part of the South when it's clearly situated in the northern half of the country?

The answer can be traced back a century and a half, to the battle lines drawn in the American Civil War. When people in those states wave the Confederate flag, they're pinning their colours to a mast of identity that was first erected in the early 1860s, and that is still held dear in some quarters, long after the causes of that war, and many of the issues it was fought over, have been settled.

It's hard to believe sometimes that otherwise fairly liberal people, who cling staunchly to the notion of "freedom", can feel a kinship to a flag that was first used to unite the above-mentioned southern states in the preservation of slavery. But just as the meaning of that flag has changed for many who fly it – simply representing regional allegiance and honouring of the dead – the motivation for those fighting the American Civil War in the first place went far above and beyond its initial powderkeg issue, and in fact many opposed the philosophy of racial equality they were ostensibly fighting to promote.

IT WAS ABOUT THE RIGHT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT, OF CULTURAL AS WELL AS ECONOMIC SELF-PRESERVATION, AND WHAT IT REALLY MEANT TO BE AMERICAN IN "THE LAND OF THE FREE"

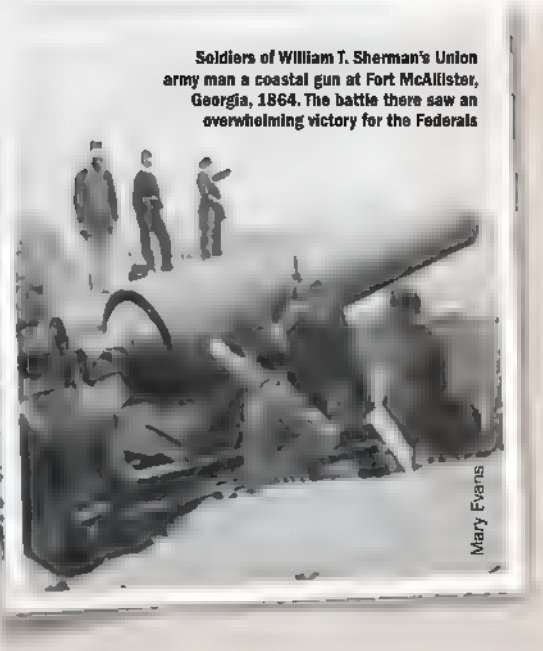
Swathe of devastation

Like many wars before and since, the American Civil War began primarily because of economics – the South wanted to preserve slave labour, and the North feared the power it gave them in the marketplace. The South also had disproportionate political power, as the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 meant that slaves counted as only 0.6 of a person when population figures were calculated, giving slave states more seats in the Senate than their true size and population merited.

But once battle lines were drawn and arms taken up, the war became about many other things, particularly for those who were doing the fighting. It was about the right of self-government, of cultural as well as economic self-preservation, and what it really meant to be American in "the land of the free". Winning that argument would cost 600,000 lives and cut a swathe of devastation across the country, as well as opening up divisions across a nation that remain to this day ▶

BACKSTORY

In the 1860 Presidential election, Abraham Lincoln's Republican Party resolved to curb the expansion of slavery in the United States. This led to seven slave states seceding and forming their own Confederate government, with more to join them...



Soldiers of William T. Sherman's Union army man a coastal gun at Fort McAllister, Georgia, 1864. The battle there saw an overwhelming victory for the Federals

Mary Evans

and are reflected every time you talk of America in terms of North or South

But it was a fight that had to happen, as the storm had been brewing for decades. Since the 1780s, most of the states north of the Ohio River had gradually outlawed slavery. But the 1820 Missouri Compromise, which allowed the new state to practise slavery but no others north of the 36°30' parallel north, reflected an uneasy acceptance that the southern states would retain the right to allow the slave trade.

Those in opposition were becoming more militant. William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, launched in 1831, demanded the abolition of slavery, arguing: "That which is not just is not law", and vowing: "I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat."

Books such as *The Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass*, a memoir by a slave, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe highlighting the horrors of a life of bondage, helped turn the tide of opinion at home and abroad ever further against the slave trade.

Federal guns bombard Fort Sumter, South Carolina, in the first real battle of the American Civil War, April 1861

The Mexican War of the late 1840s secured new territory for the United States, into which businesses in both the North and the South were keen to expand. Many in the cotton-rich South felt that the slave trade could only continue if it expanded west. This would be bad news for expansionist businesses from the North, however, since rich southern traders would be able to buy up the best land and sell their products more cheaply, as they relied on free (slave) labour.

Bloody revenge

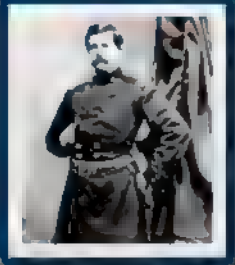
The Compromise of 1850 was a series of laws attempting to appease both sides, giving new states the right to decide for themselves if they would permit slavery. The 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act gave those new states the same rights, resulting in pro- and anti-slavery campaigners flooding Kansas to try and sway the vote either way.

Figures such as John Brown, who believed in armed resistance, to encourage revolt from slaves and trigger abolition by violent means, further inflamed tensions. The 1857 Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court refused to free the slave of the same name, despite his having lived for years on free soil, with Judge Taney decreeing that negroes were "beings of an inferior order... [and have] no rights which the white man was bound to respect".

Many slave-owners in the South feared that freed slaves would be encouraged to revolt and gain bloody revenge on their masters. Even those who weren't in favour of the practise were fearful of what might happen if it were outlawed Slavery, said the pro-abolition Thomas Jefferson, was like holding "a wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go".

This concern was heightened when, in October 1859, John Brown took a 21-man army into the US arsenal at

Key figures



GEORGE MCCLELLAN

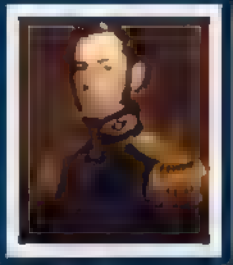
This would-be presidential candidate played a key role in organising the thousands of volunteers into a well-trained Union army. But as general-in-chief, he over-estimated Confederate numbers and missed early chances to put the North's forces into the ascendancy.

ULYSSES S. GRANT

Although his tactics resulted in a high level of casualties, Grant's aggressive approach was undeniably effective, and he played a large part in turning the tide of the war in the Union's favour. He was also instrumental in bringing African-American recruits into the conflict.

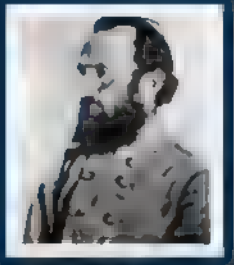
WILLIAM T. SHERMAN

One of Grant's most trusted Generals, Sherman is considered a master of "manoeuvre warfare". However, his reputation has arguably been tainted by his implementation of what he called "hard war", laying waste to large swathes of the South.



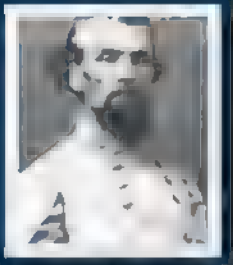
ROBERT E. LEE

Offered command of the Union forces, Lee chose to side with his home state of Virginia, and he helped the Confederates score vital early victories. Despite his errors at Gettysburg, his strategies helped a heavily outnumbered army punch way above its weight.



THOMAS JACKSON

One of the Confederates' most feared Generals, "Stonewall" inspired his men to numerous victories against the odds, through the use of inventive tactics and formidable motivational skills. A deeply religious man, he hated fighting on Sundays.



NATHAN BEDFORD FORREST

The Lieutenant General was one of the rebels' trump cards. He earned a reputation for daring raids, using startling speed to outflank more cumbersome Union opponents. In April 1864, he was implicated in a massacre of black Union troops at Fort Pillow.

Images: Wikimedia

SLAVE-OWNERS IN THE SOUTH FEARED THAT FREED SLAVES WOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO REVOLT AND GAIN BLOODY REVENGE ON THEIR MASTERS

Harpers Ferry, Virginia, and attempted to provoke an armed uprising. Prophetically, on the morning of his hanging, Brown wrote: "I am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

Meanwhile, the Republican Party had now formed, with abolitionists holding sway, and they took advantage of a split in the Democrat ranks that led the older party to form two wings: a pro-slavery wing in the South and an anti-slavery wing in the North. Abraham Lincoln would fight the 1860 Presidential campaign on an abolitionist ticket, and he won a convincing victory, despite gaining only 40 per cent of the vote in an election where his name was not even on the ballot paper in ten of the southern states (yet another bone of contention for his opponents).

KILLER IN THE PICTURE PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS PHOTOGRAPHED WITH HIS EVENTUAL ASSASSIN, JOHN WILKES BOOTH, AT HIS SECOND INAUGURATION.

Abraham Lincoln (centre) visits the site of the Battle of Antietam, 1862. The photograph was taken by Mathew Brady, seen by many as the godfather of photo-journalism

The fighting begins

Lincoln's election was the last straw for many in power across the South. Within six weeks, South Carolina had voted unanimously to secede from the Union and become the Republic of South Carolina. Some more sober observers could see that the rebel states were only speeding up the process of slavery's abolition. As wild celebrations of the secession broke out, former congressman James Petigru remarked: "South Carolina is too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum."

Nonetheless, shortly after Lincoln's inauguration in January 1860, five other states followed suit, and by this time state militias were being organised, with several Federal buildings seized across the rebel states. Montgomery, Alabama, was chosen as the capital of the Confederate States of America on 1 February and, on the same day, Texas became the seventh state to announce secession. Jefferson Davis was inaugurated as the Confederate States' President on 18 February, and a month later his Vice President, Alexander Stephens, left no one in any doubt as to the driving philosophy behind this new nation: "Our new Government is founded upon... the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery – subordination to the superior race – is his natural and moral condition."

Mary Evans

For all that, on the face of it, the ordinary southern gent did not have a great deal to gain from going to war. Slavery didn't benefit most of those who signed up to fight, and only a minority of slave-owners had more than three or four slaves. But the idea that "We do things differently down here", was a strong driving philosophy. The notion that the Yankees from up North were seeking to destroy their way of life and restrict their freedom – not to mention flood the labour market with newly freed negroes – spurred tens of thousands into action to defend their home states.

The fighting itself began innocuously enough. At 4.30am on the morning of 12 April 1861, General Pierre Beauregard ordered his Confederate artillery to begin bombarding the Federal troops occupying Fort Sumter in the harbour of Charleston, South Carolina. They had tried and failed to seize the fort the previous December, shortly after the state seceded from the Union, but this time they weren't to be denied. After 34 hours, they eventually succeeded in persuading the inhabitants to raise the white flag. President Lincoln responded with a formal declaration of war.

UNION SOLDIER **The typical Union soldier was a man in his 20s, hailing from a rural area. At the beginning of the war, when it was predicted to be a short conflict, many signed up voluntarily, but as events escalated new recruits were drafted. Those who were called up to serve were usually poor, as the draft could be avoided by paying the sum of $300.**

"All the past we leave behind at Sumter," wrote poet Walt Whitman in the *Brooklyn Daily News*, and he was right in suspecting that his country would never be the same again. Yet Whitman was as fervent a supporter of the war (and the Union cause) as anyone.

Drink problems

The only casualty of that first battle was a Confederate horse, so it's perhaps not surprising that when Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to join the Union army (then just 17,000-strong) and extinguish the rebellion, floods of eager candidates came forward from all corners of the northern states. Few seemed to be put off by the possibility of mass bloodshed or other associated horrors that would eventually materialise.

From Boston to Baltimore, New York to New Hampshire, whole towns full of men travelled, among them doctors and lawyers alongside drunks and hoodlums, despite many having never fought with ▶

Technology and its role in the South's downfall

Advances in technology played a huge role in the Civil War, and made it, for many historians, the first modern conflict. Newly electrified railroads were vital in moving troops, supplies and medical staff around – hence the increasing focus on capturing transport hubs, and General William T. Sherman's orders to rip the rails up as he infamous "March to the Sea" (the twisted remains became known as "Sherman's neckties"). Hot-air balloons were also used for reconnaissance for the first time, while the advent of the electronic telegraph allowed President Lincoln and his generals to keep daily tabs on events across all fronts by the end of the conflict.

Advances in rifle technology meant that by the end of the war, both sides could shoot with greater accuracy. General John Sedgwick famously scoffed: "They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance," shortly before being shot dead by a Confederate sniper at Spotsylvania Court House. The advent of iron-clad warships led to a famous, if inconclusive, encounter between CSS Virginia (aka the Merrimac) and USS Monitor, with the latter vessel's revolving gun turret a particularly innovative feature.

Meanwhile, the camera was coming of age as a means of documenting conflict, and Mathew Brady's team of 20 photographers succeeded in making a comprehensive pictorial record of proceedings that had an impact in bringing home the realities of war to the civilian population.

WEALTHY DAYTRIPPERS FROM NEARBY WASHINGTON TRAVELLED OUT TO MANASSAS HOPING TO WITNESS A BATTLE FROM THE SAFETY OF THE HILLS

This 300-pounder Parrott gun was used by the Federals against Fort Sumter and Fort Wagner, even after it had been damaged

Mary Evans

any weapon more formidable than their fists. Among them were the likes of Ulysses S. Grant, a 38-year-old who struggled with drink problems and had previously abandoned a henceforth mediocre military career to work back at his father's tannery store. Recognised as one of the few people with military experience, he was asked to recruit and train a company of volunteers.

Soon afterwards, the Confederate call to arms drew an enthusiastic response from states including the newly seceded Tennessee, North Carolina, Arkansas and Virginia. Judging by the gung-ho determination of these young men to "go and kill some Yankees" as they gathered together in motley crews such as the Tallapoosa Thrashers and the Chickasaw Desperados, they might just as easily have been embarking on a particularly riotous stag weekend.

This war would be over in little more than a few months, most agreed, and what was more, this would be a white man's war. Black volunteers were turned away... for the time being, at least.

Even for those not taking part, the war was often more a cause of excitement than trepidation. Skirmishes were breaking out across the country but there hadn't been any major battle as yet, and the worst horrors of war had yet to be witnessed.

That all changed when Confederate Generals got word of Union plans to seize a strategically important rail crossing near Manassas, Virginia, and lay in wait along a stream known as Bull Run.

Hard though it may be to believe now, scores of wealthy daytrippers from nearby Washington travelled out to Manassas hoping to witness a battle from the safety of the surrounding hills, taking picnic hampers and champagne for the trip. What followed certainly wouldn't have made for cheery family viewing, although the Union forces made early gains. As southern forces scattered, Union troops thought the battle – perhaps even the war – was already won. How wrong they were.

Fled in panic

They reckoned without the Virginia brigade under Thomas Jackson, who were witnessed by fleeing South Carolina and Georgia troops "standing like a stone wall". They rallied behind their fanatical, fearless and ruthless leader, who encouraged them to wail like banshees as they counter attacked. Bolstered by newly arrived reinforcements, the Confederate army routed the Union forces, who fled in panic, tripping over abandoned civilian carriages and their comrades' discarded kit as they went. It became known as "the Great Skedaddle", as Union troops trickled back into Washington with their tails between their legs – and those were the lucky ones who still had both lower limbs to walk on.

Over 800 lay dead by the battle's end, with piles of hurriedly amputated limbs lying elsewhere. Casual punters wouldn't be returning to this festival in a hurry.

Yet the fight for Virginia had barely begun. While Confederate President Davis bathed in the glory of a handsome victory, the Union took decisive action, replacing commander Irvin McDowell

1860 TIMELINE

6 NOVEMBER
The pro-abolitionist Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln is elected US President.

20 DECEMBER
In protest at plans to outlaw the slave trade, South Carolina becomes the first of 11 US states to secede from the Union and form the Confederate States of America (CSA).

1861

12 APRIL
Battle of Fort Sumter
Confederate militia's attempts to take the Federal fort in Charleston Harbor represent the first real battle of the conflict. Lincoln declares war the following day.

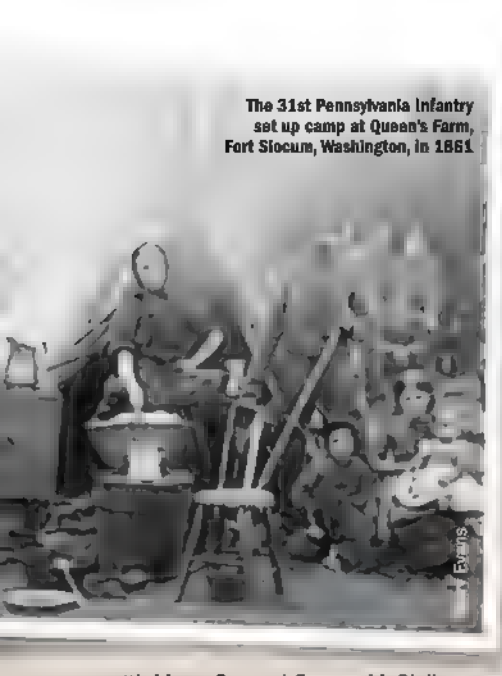
21 JULY
First Battle of Bull Run
This Confederate victory in Prince William County, Virginia, brings home what a formidable force the Union are up against, despite their superior numbers.

1862

6-7 APRIL
Battle of Shiloh
The bloodiest battle of the war so far sees 23,000 casualties in a surprise Confederate attack on Union forces on the Tennessee River.

30 AUGUST
Second Battle of Bull Run
Another Confederate victory in Virginia leads foreign powers to believe that the Union cannot prevail in the war, and heightens political pressure for a settlement.

17 SEPTEMBER
Battle of Antietam
As Robert E. Lee's advance into Maryland is halted, more casualties (for both sides) are incurred today than on any other day in US history. Yet it is considered a qualified Union victory.



The 31st Pennsylvania Infantry set up camp at Queen's Farm, Fort Slocum, Washington, in 1861

The aftermath of the Battle of Richmond. As well as the destroyed buildings, there were more than 5,000 casualties

with Major General George McClellan, who had been dubbed "the young Napoleon" in the press for leading the rout of a small Confederate force at Rich Mountain a couple of weeks previously.

McClellan found a chaotic and demoralised force, who he whipped into shape over the months to come. However, further west, the Union forces were again defeated at Wilson's Creek, Missouri, suggesting it would take more than mere discipline to win this war.

The Union wasn't helped by the ineptitude of other leaders, who miscalculated their tactics so badly at Ball's Bluff that a US Senator, Colonel Edward D. Baker, was among nearly half the Union force that were cut down, leading to Congress demanding greater controls over strategy.

McClellan needed to convince the President that a morale-boosting offensive was in the offing. He devised plans to sail a huge armada down the Rappahannock River before moving over land, up the peninsula towards the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. But his natural instinct was for caution, and although the rebel forces were far outnumbered, McClellan convinced himself otherwise. Such was his reluctance to attack that President Lincoln said at one point, "If General McClellan does not want to use the army, I should like to borrow it for a time."

Clever tactics from the Confederates only reinforced McClellan's hesitancy. They were found to have used logs painted black to look like cannons (known as "quaker guns"), and when Union forces reached Yorktown on their way up the peninsula, Confederate commander John Magruder moved his small army back and forth around the area to fool Union reconnaissance missions into thinking they were much greater in number. This tactic put off the risk-averse McClellan, and in the meantime reinforcements arrived to bolster the rebels' numbers.

"Nobody but McClellan could have hesitated to attack," sneered Confederate General Joseph Johnston. McClellan's tactics earned him the nickname "the Virginia Creeper".

Heavy losses

When McClellan was finally ready to move in on Richmond, General Robert E. Lee also outmanoeuvred him with the bold move of dividing at Mechanicsville Lee correctly calculated that McClellan wouldn't risk a move to take Richmond (even though he had around twice the number of men, and would've had a good chance of success), and chose to attack Union forces in a series of engagements known as the Seven Days Battles, over the space of a week at the end of June 1862. Although Lee's forces suffered heavy losses, McClellan still failed to take Richmond, and by this time his own men were losing faith in him.

McClellan told Lincoln that they had not lost, they had simply failed to win. And he asked for 50,000 more men to finish the job. But, like a football manager whose cautious tactics have failed to yield results but who still demands money for new signings, his days were numbered.

McClellan's even more self-assured colleague Major General John Pope ▶

1863

22 SEPTEMBER

First Emancipation Proclamation

Galvanised by the news from Antietam, President Lincoln announces the outlawing of slavery in states currently under Confederate control.

1-3 JULY

Battle of Gettysburg

The Confederate advance reaches its high-water mark. After the fateful mistake of Pickett's Charge, Lee will never again have a chance to get so far into northern territory.

1864

2 SEPTEMBER

Atlanta is taken

After another siege, General William T. Sherman takes the Georgia city before embarking on his devastating "March to the Sea"

8 NOVEMBER

Lincoln is re-elected

After Lincoln seemed certain to be voted out, with his likely replacement seeking to end the war via a compromise, Union battlefield gains help secure a second term.

1865

2 APRIL

Siege of Petersburg ends

The ten-month stalemate outside Richmond is broken when Lee is forced to flee with his men. Richmond falls soon afterwards.

9 APRIL

Appomattox Court House

Lee attempts to flee to the Carolinas, but is cornered and forced to surrender unconditionally.

14 APRIL

Lincoln assassinated

The President is shot dead by anti-abolitionist John Wilkes Booth. It does not prevent slavery from being officially abolished in December.

fared little better when he took over the Army of Virginia and charged after the Confederates. The wily tactics of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and "Bobby" Lee led the Union forces into a trap at the Second Battle of Bull Run near Manassas, while General James "Jeb" Stuart raided the Union base and stole substantial supplies. Some 25,000 men were left dead, wounded or missing – five times the casualties of the First Battle of Bull Run – and McClellan was called back into action to help the Union forces regroup. It was at this point that he benefited from a huge stroke of luck. His men found an abandoned Confederate camp, where a copy of Lee's orders to his troops were discovered wrapped around a packet of cigars.

Yet, as ever, McClellan took his time to act on this vital information, delaying for 18 hours before setting out to attack the Confederate forces at South Mountain. This allowed Lee time to receive word that McClellan knew of his plans, and

MCCLELLAN'S MEN FOUND AN ABANDONED CONFEDERATE CAMP, WHERE LEE'S ORDERS WERE FOUND WRAPPED AROUND A PACKET OF CIGARS

CONFEDERATE SOLDIER Compared to his Union counterpart, the typical Confederate soldier had a somewhat shabby appearance, but he was generally tougher due to experiencing harder living conditions. Uniforms were often ill-fitting and not everyone had footwear – the lucky ones that did often nailed horse shoes to the base to preserve the soles.

Mary Evans

IN THE LINE OF FIRE NURSE CLARA BARTON WAS ATTENDING TO A WOUNDED SOLDIER DURING THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM WHEN A STRAY BULLET PENETRATED HER SLEEVE AND KILLED THE MAN SHE WAS HELPING.

the two forces met head-on in what became the bloodiest day in US military history – at the Battle of Antietam, near Sharpsburg, on 17 September 1862.

Union General "Fighting" Joe Hooker led his men into an attack on the rebels around a church, before "Stonewall" Jackson sent a division in to counter.

"Every stalk of corn was cut as closely as could have been done with a knife," Hooker wrote later, "and the slain lay in ranks, precisely as they had stood in their ranks a few moments before."

The Confederates were outnumbered, but Jackson's lines held. Still, 8,000 lay dead or wounded. Afterwards, Jackson was said to have sat on his horse eating a peach, surveying the carnage. "God has been very kind to us this day," said the eccentric, devoutly religious leader.

Yet this was just the start, and Lee's men fought a similarly fierce battle nearby, standing firm until Union soldiers found a vantage point to shoot down upon the southerners in the valley below, which proved decisive. Finally, Union General Ambrose Burnside led an assault on a bridge, with 12,500 men attacking just 400 Confederates commanding the higher ground. After three charges, the Union prevailed.

By the end of the day, Lee had lost a quarter of his army, but McClellan elected not to call on further reserves to drive the Confederates further back into Virginia. Instead, their advance was merely halted, and they could regroup to fight another day.

Momentous events

Nonetheless, Antietam was considered a victory for the Union, and it was a timely one for an embattled President because momentous events were also taking place away from the frontline. The first income tax was introduced by the Union to help pay for the war effort. The Militia Act of July 1862 allowed African-Americans to sign up for military duty, and although they were still paid only half that of their white counterparts and were often restricted to menial and servile roles, it was another step forward in that long-running battle. Then, on 22 September, President Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all slaves in states in active rebellion against the Federal Government would be freed.

Ever the skilled politician, his statement wasn't quite as significant as he made out – after all, he was freeing slaves in the Confederate states, which he had no control over. He also exempted South Carolina, Tennessee and Louisiana, which had already been recaptured, but declared that any slaves escaping and moving north would no longer be returned to their masters. Jefferson Davis called it "the most execrable measure recorded in the history of guilty man", but it led to a flood of slaves heading north to freedom, further weakening the southern economy.

Why didn't Britain get involved?

Britain remained neutral throughout the American Civil War, dashing the Confederates' hopes that European powers' reliance on "king cotton" would provoke an intervention. That stance was far from a foregone conclusion, however, when a diplomatic dispute broke out in 1861 after a US naval officer took control of a British mail ship and seized two Confederate diplomats on board. The British fleet was immediately put on a war footing, and around 11,000 troops were despatched to Canada. President Lincoln sensed the danger and quickly arranged for the prisoners' release.

Soon after hostilities began, the Union navy set its sights on blockading southern ports to cut off trade across the Atlantic and starve the southern economy. At the same time, though, Confederate leaders resolved to actively restrict cotton exports to Europe, in order to encourage that intervention. That wasn't such a realistic option, since Europe also relied on wheat exports from the North, and eventually the Emancipation Proclamation made it politically impossible.

However, by the summer of 1862, British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston was nonetheless suggesting mediation and agreement on division, with Europe arbitrating between the two sides and recognising the Confederacy. A plan was drawn up, which Palmerston was planning to put to Parliament if General Lee's forces had continued their advance into the North after the Second Battle of Bull Run in August 1862. If it hadn't been for the Union's perceived victory at Antietam, they might well have gone ahead with the plan.

All the same, British public opinion was more in favour of the Union side – Manchester cotton workers famously sent a message of support to Lincoln, despite suffering famine conditions due to the recession in their industry, and he replied in kind, thanking them for "sublime Christian heroism".

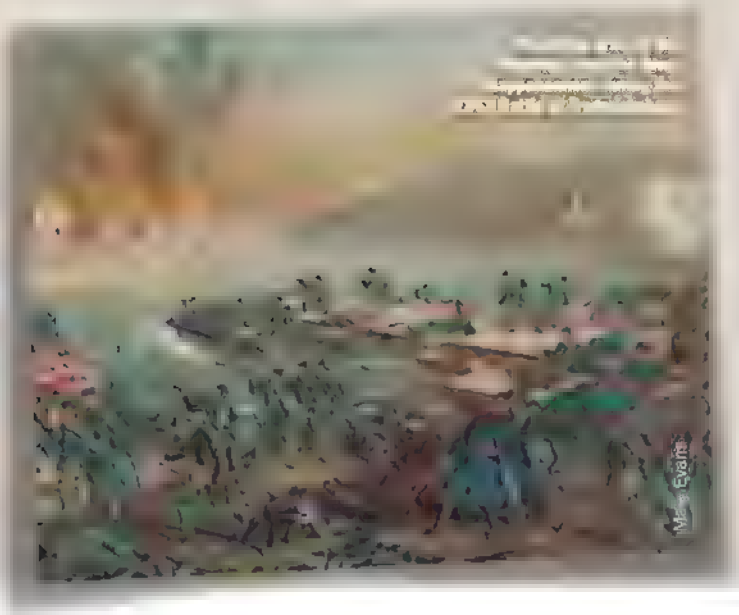
The 1862 Battle of Antietam, the first major battle of the war to be fought on Union soil

In this painting by Thure de Thulstrup, Ulysses S. Grant can be seen directing his Union troops to victory at the 1862 Battle of Shiloh

It also effectively put an end to Confederate hopes that Britain or France might join the war on their side, since neither country would be prepared to oppose a government committed to ending slavery.

Elsewhere, public enthusiasm for the war was fading. Mathew Brady's photos displaying "the Dead of Antietam" further brought home to Americans the horrors that had henceforth been ignored amid the rallying cries and recruitment drives. Given the increasing difficulties in finding volunteers to join the fight, the influx of black soldiers would prove useful.

There was no such option for the Confederate forces, who were subject to conscription and who were further demoralised in October 1862 when they learned of a new law to exempt anyone who owned 20 negroes to go home. "It raised the howl, 'Rich man's war, poor man's fight'," wrote Confederate soldier Sam Watkins. "From this time on, a soldier was simply a machine, a conscript. All pride and valour had gone. We were sick of war and cursed the southern Confederacy."



The hapless McClellan was finally removed from his position as chief of the Potomac army in Virginia, and replaced by Ambrose Burnside, who was given a brief to advance more aggressively towards Richmond. To the west, however, Ulysses S. Grant's reputation had grown. After helping secure Kentucky in two major battles, he'd become known as "Unconditional Surrender" Grant, due to his reputed assertion that he would accept no terms other than that. Although the appalling bloodshed at the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862 was another reminder of just how steeped in senseless bloodletting this war had become, he had emerged victorious. And despite doubts among the hierarchy, and criticism in the press over Grant's willingness to soak up casualties and his fondness for the bottle, Lincoln remained a fan of his aggressive approach.

Grant's star would further ascend when he set his sights on the fortified city of Vicksburg, a strategically vital spot on the last Confederate-controlled section of the Mississippi River. Jefferson Davis had described the hilltop town as "the nail that holds the two halves of the South together". Alongside Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, he made numerous attempts via river and railroad to take the city during the autumn of 1862, but was frustrated every time.

General Burnside would also find his best efforts fall short in the latest attempt to advance on Richmond. He planned to cross the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg in November, then proceed to Richmond before Lee's armies could stop him. However, bureaucratic delays meant that he didn't receive the necessary floating pontoon bridges in time, and Lee was able to gather a welcome party together. Despite bombarding the town itself, the Union forces' subsequent attempts to breach the Confederate lines on the higher ground of Marye's Heights were repelled, with over 12,000 casualties.

It was a near suicidal mission and by the end of 1862, there was a feeling in some quarters that, despite their superior numbers, the Union might just find a way to lose this war...

Ruthless aggression

While a much-needed boost to northern morale came at the Battle of Stones River, which allowed the Union to keep control of central Tennessee (albeit at the cost of 23,500 casualties), the eastern theatre was the scene of more grim news for the Union as General Burnside was once again repelled in Virginia in the Mud March south of Fredericksburg.

President Lincoln relieved Burnside of his duties and replaced him with General Hooker. "Fighting" Joe vowed no mercy on General Lee. But ruthless aggression and massive numerical advantage would be no match for a Confederate leader ▶

Three Confederate soldiers taken prisoner by Union forces during the Battle of Gettysburg

who had already proved himself to be one of history's true geniuses of military strategy

Hooker aimed to once again tackle the rebel armies at Fredericksburg. This time, the initial assault would be something of a diversion, as only part of his army would engage the Confederates at their front, while the rest marched west up the Rappahannock River, crossed and attacked Lee from the rear.

The latter force, 70,000-strong, set up camp near Chancellorsville, only to find that Lee had second-guessed them. In an audacious and risky move, the Confederate General left just a quarter of his men at Fredericksburg, and directed the rest of his army west towards Chancellorsville.

Hooker reacted with confusion and ordered his men back to defend their base at Chancellor House. The following day, Lee divided his forces again, sending "Stonewall" Jackson on a long march around the Union's right flank. Hooker assumed that the Confederates were retreating and chose to stay put. Jackson's men attacked the Federal army at speed, and only nightfall prevented a rout. However, while scouting for positions after dark, Jackson was shot by nervous members of his own army, and lost an arm. He subsequently contracted pneumonia and died, robbing Lee of one of his finest fellow officers.

The Union had suffered another humiliating reverse, with some 17,000 casualties to boot, but Lee, after his finest hour as a General, had received a major blow to his own war effort.

Shelled into submission

Grant's attempts to seize Vicksburg had so far come to nought, but he now hatched a new plan. He would march down the Mississippi on the western side, and attack the town from the south. His plan succeeded and his men won five battles en route to surrounding Vicksburg, trapping around 35,000 Confederate soldiers.

A direct assault proved unsuccessful, but the siege worried Jefferson Davis enough for him to summon General Lee to Richmond to decide their next move. Lee's plan was to push north into Maryland and Pennsylvania to force Grant to divert his attentions there in case the Confederates tried to take Washington.

WHILE SCOUTING FOR POSITIONS AFTER DARK, JACKSON WAS SHOT BY NERVOUS MEMBERS OF HIS OWN ARMY, AND LOST AN ARM

Throughout June, he pushed on as his armies to the west in Vicksburg were being starved and shelled into submission. Joe Hooker, meanwhile, made the mistake of falling out with President Lincoln, and when he petulantly offered his resignation, it was immediately accepted. He was replaced by General George Meade, who immediately found himself fighting what would become known as the most pivotal battle of the entire war.

A band of Confederate infantry advanced on the small crossroads town of Gettysburg to try and get their hands on a supply of shoes for their badly equipped men. But they ran into Union cavalry and a fierce exchange broke out. Reinforcements from all around converged on the town and at first, the Union forces were pushed back.

For the first two days of the battle, although the Union repelled numerous rebel attacks, General Lee grew in confidence. His army of Northern Virginia had previously scored victory

Confederate wounded convalesce following the brutal Battle of Antietam, 1862

after victory over the Union's army of the Potomac, and on day three of the Battle of Gettysburg he felt sufficiently emboldened to attack the centre of the Union's position at Cemetery Ridge.

The move was led by General George Pickett, who was taking a division into combat for the first time. He was keen to tackle this death-or-glory mission but, for once, the great general bit off far more than he could chew.

An artillery barrage aimed at softening the Union lines had little effect. General Meade saw them coming and ordered his men to hold fire, both to conserve energy for the battle ahead and to lure the Confederates into the open field. His plan bore fruit, as the rebels marched quietly across the mile and a half towards the Union forces lined up on the ridge, hoping to take them by surprise.

The Union artillery ripped huge holes in the Confederate ranks, who, once they were within 200 yards, were cut down by musket and cannon. "Pickett's Charge" was a disastrous failure, and Lee met his retreating troops with the sorry admission, "This is all my fault."

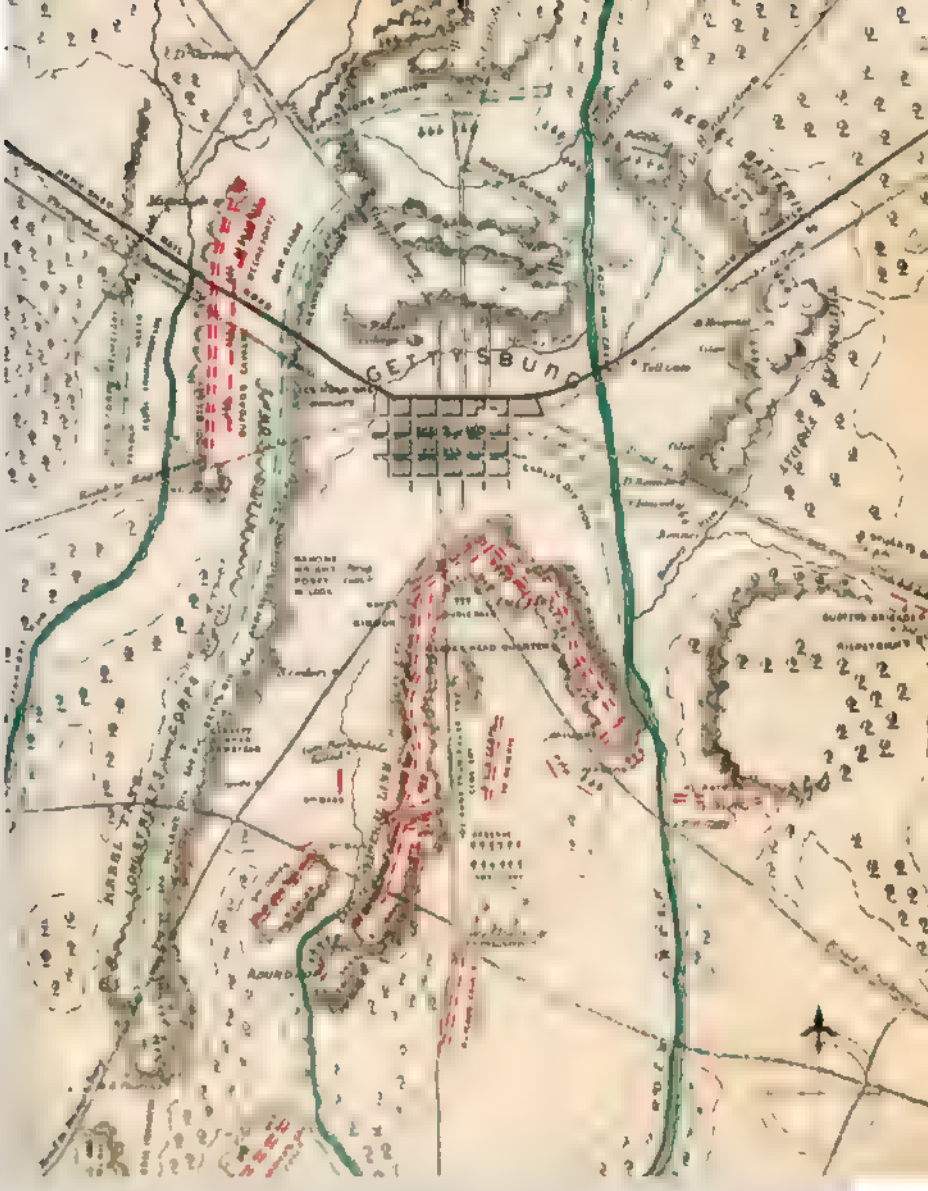
When asked to rally his division for a possible Union counter-attack, Pickett told Lee, "I have no division now."

The 51,000 casualties at Gettysburg included a third of the Confederate forces, and Lee was forced to retreat back into Virginia, never regaining the chance to move so far north.

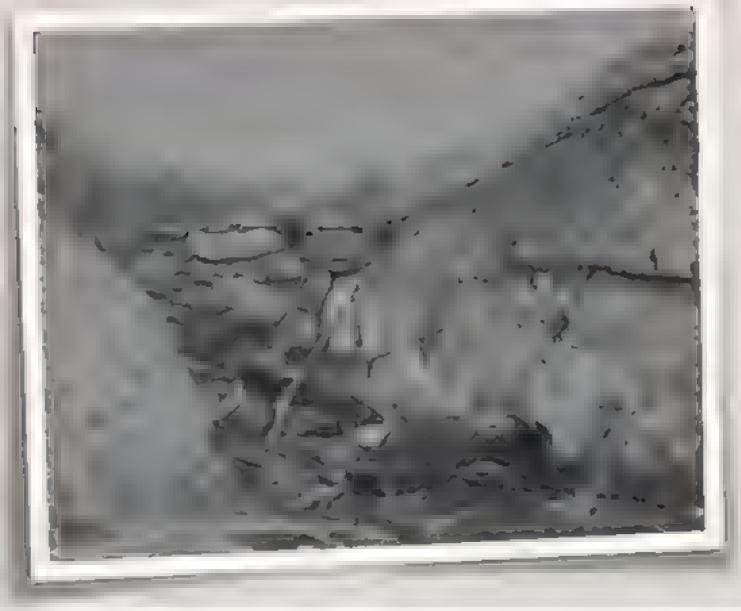
Meade elected not to pursue the retreating Confederate troops, and once again President Lincoln was dismayed at his Generals' lack of aggression.

On the same day Lee's men retreated from Gettysburg, the besieged 31,000-strong Confederate forces at Vicksburg – who had been battered for 48 days on end, from land and river – finally surrendered, and the Stars and Stripes were raised on the courthouse on 4 July. The soldiers there had been reduced to eating dogs and mules, and for many years afterwards the traditional festivities on America's Independence Day would not be celebrated by this Mississippi town, as the memories they brought back were too painful.

CIVIL SICKNESS
IT'S BELIEVED THAT DISEASE KILLED TWICE AS MANY MEN AS BATTLE WOUNDS DID DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.



A map of the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg, which racked up more than 50,000 casualties



A Confederate soldier lies dead at the bottom of Devil's Den, a hill used during the Battle of Gettysburg. It's believed that the body was moved there by photographer Alexander Gardner for dramatic effect

The Union forces had recaptured the Mississippi River, and the Confederate territory was split. Yet the war had never been less popular in the North, and the draft (with exemption available for anyone who could stump up $300) was widely resented, leading to riots and lynchings in New York and elsewhere, as locals objected to the influx of freed black slaves and blamed them for the war – and the draft.

The targets for their wrath took a different view, and 85 per cent of eligible black men signed up, with the incentive that no one could deny their citizenship once they had fought for their country.

Brilliant campaign

The Union was now firmly in the ascendancy, and its next focus was the drive for control of Tennessee. In the autumn of 1863, Major General William Rosencrans fought a brilliant campaign to outmanoeuvre Confederate General Braxton Bragg at Tullahoma, before he was forced to retreat at the bloody Battle of Chickamauga. After departing the field, Rosencrans' second-in-command, General George Thomas, led an heroic resistance to beat back numerous Confederate assaults, earning him the nickname "the Rock of Chickamauga". Nonetheless, the Union forces ended up besieged in Chattanooga, until Grant ordered 40,000 reinforcements under Generals Sherman and Hooker to help drive the Confederates back at strategic high ground such as Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. Bragg's men were forced back into Georgia, and Lincoln rewarded Ulysses Grant with promotion to the lofty status of Lieutenant General and commander of all Union armies.

Sherman took command of operations in the western theatre, and immediately moved the Union armies south-east through the hills of Georgia towards the strategically important rail and supply hub of Atlanta. Throughout May and June, the Union slowly gained ground, via an almost never-ending series of battles.

Eventually, they reached Atlanta to find it heavily fortified. This was part of the Confederate strategy – to "win by not losing". Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee hoped that the heavy losses the Union would incur in the process of trying to dislodge their forces would result in a stalemate, and heighten already-fervent anti-war sentiments in the North. This, they hoped, would lead to President Lincoln being deposed by a new commander-in-chief in the November ▶

This stunningly detailed painting shows Confederate forces trying to repel a Union landing party during the Second Battle of Fort Fisher in January 1865. The battle resulted in a victory for the Republican army

Lincoln – hero and victim of the Civil War

While you could argue that it was his election that triggered its start, there seems little doubt that without President Abraham Lincoln's skilled political leadership, the war could have had a less-conclusive outcome.

Lincoln realised the importance not only of the Union aggressively pursuing the conflict to its conclusion (resisting strong public and political pressure for a settlement), but also of conciliation (hence the healing words of the Gettysburg Address). His role in sealing the demise of slavery (and destabilising the southern war effort by pushing measures through that allowed slaves to escape north) cannot be underestimated, for all the fence-hedging nature of the original Emancipation Proclamation.

The President would pay for his boldness with his life, however – John Wilkes Booth taking the anti-abolition cause into his own hands just days after General Robert E. Lee's surrender. A famous stage actor, as well as being an alcoholic and a white supremacist, Booth used his celebrity to gain access to Lincoln's box at Washington's Ford Theatre on 14 April 1865, and shot the President in the head, before leaping onto the stage and reputedly shouting the Latin slogan "Sic semper tyrannis" – the Virginia state motto, meaning "Thus always to tyrants". A great leader was dead, but his anti-slavery cause would live on.

Several months after the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, President Lincoln travelled to the scene to deliver his Gettysburg Address (below) in honour of the Union dead

election, one who would be more amenable to negotiation.

Sure enough, the campaign for Atlanta was long, and the casualty list ever lengthening, with the city being shelled incessantly as Sherman ordered the war to be taken to its civilians.

Trench warfare

Meanwhile, to the east, Lee's rebels had been matching Grant's Federal forces blow for bloody blow at Spotsylvania Courthouse, North Anna and Cold Harbor. Eventually, Grant headed for Petersburg, south of Richmond, ahead of Lee and with his sights on the railroad junction from which nearby Richmond was supplied. However, Union forces weren't able to overcome the small Confederate army defending the city, and, after Lee's reinforcements arrived, both sides suffered yet more heavy losses in a seemingly interminable siege, featuring the kind of trench warfare that was more famously employed during the First World War.

Elsewhere, Union forces had been routed in the Shenandoah Valley, and locked in an inconclusive but costly battle at the James River. By the end of August, as the Presidential campaign began, the Democrat candidate, former Union General George McClellan, campaigned on a pro-peace ticket, promising an immediate end to hostilities and a compromise to prevent further bloodshed.

So it was a huge relief to the Union when Confederate forces fled Atlanta overnight on 1 to 2 September, after Sherman's men had severed the last railroad into the city, starving it of resources. The citizens quickly raised the white flag, and the resulting morale boost for the North helped Abraham Lincoln to gain re-election against the General who had once dismissed him as a "well-meaning baboon".

Controversial approach

The price was to be a heavy one, and the people of the South paid the bulk of it. General Philip Sheridan had already introduced a scorched-earth policy to raze the Shenandoah Valley's infrastructure to the ground in the north-east, when Sherman ordered the Union army to destroy much of what they found – from railroads to crops to livestock to civilian homes – along their 300-mile "March to the Sea" from Atlanta, and live off supplies appropriated from them. This ruthless policy pioneered a new form of total warfare that is still used to devastating effect today. Sherman's controversial approach, which is said to have caused over $100 million worth of damage, devastated the ability of the South to wage further war.

Sherman's forces went on to take a stranglehold over the city of Savannah, at which point Confederate General William Hardee chose to evacuate the city rather than surrender, and fled north with the city's garrison, having agreed with Sherman that those who stayed would remain unharmed.

Having sent a telegraph to Lincoln, informing him, "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah," Sherman was ordered north to aid the ongoing siege of Petersburg. En route, he continued through the Carolinas, laying waste to cities such as Columbia with even greater brutality (an element of payback came into play here, since this was where secession had begun), the dwindling, demoralised Confederate forces vainly attempting to defend them.

Lee's chances of holding firm at Petersburg were evaporating by the day, as 60,000 Confederates had deserted and the Union forces were now swollen by Sherman's reinforcements. On the night of 2 to 3 April 1865, with their supply lines cut, Lee's men abandoned the trenches they had occupied for ten months, and Richmond fell the following day. Although Lee attempted to head south to join up with Confederate forces in North Carolina, his path was soon cut off and he was forced to surrender at Appomattox Court House near Lynchburg. Although other Confederate armies battled on for a couple of weeks more – some until the end of June – their war was already lost.

The final meeting between Lee and Grant was a dignified one, and Grant's terms were generous, offering 25,000 rations to the remaining Confederate armies, many of whom were at the point of starvation, if exposure and disease hadn't already claimed them.

This painting depicts Union and Confederate cavalry charging at each other during the famous Battle of Gettysburg

The men signed the surrender documents, then Lee doffed his cap and headed back to his troops. It was a suitably friendly beginning of peacetime. Grant ordered Union soldiers watching not to cheer. "The war is over, the rebels are our countrymen again," he told them

Genera. Robert E. Lee never returned to his pre-war home at Arlington House, as by that time the grounds had been turned into a cemetery for Union dead, initially to remind people of who was responsible for all those Union deaths Subsequently, it became a national memorial for dead American servicemen from all wars

THE CAMPAIGN FOR ATLANTA WAS LONG, AND THE CASUALTY LIST EVER-LENGTHENING, WITH THE CITY BEING SHELLED INCESSANTLY

Mary Evans

Confederate commander Robert E. Lee was forced to surrender at Appomattox Court House

For all the ferocity of the war waged, the old enmities didn't last. Even General Lee held no bitterness towards his former enemies, and he persuaded other southerners to be similarly forgiving. "We can laugh now at the absurd notion of there being a North and a South," wrote former Confederate soldier Sam Watkins in his memoir, *Company Aytch*, in 1882. "We are one, and undivided."

Brothers in arms

When a service of commemoration was held at Gettysburg in 1913 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the battle there, a group of rebel veterans re-enacted the doomed Pickett's Charge, running through the cornfields with their once-feared "rebel yell". Their opposite numbers from the Union army stood up on Cemetery Ridge, but instead of holding their line, they instinctively ran towards the Confederate re-enactors; and instead of cutting them down, they embraced them as brothers in arms.

The road to reconciliation for African-Americans took longer, and some would argue that it is still being walked today. Many black Americans found that, despite their role in the war effort, while they were no longer slaves, they were still second-class citizens.

Even the Union dead at Arlington were segregated by race until 1948 and although the 15th Amendment of the United States Constitution in 1870 theoretically gave all black men the vote, it was almost another century – 1965 – before the Voting Rights Act effectively ensured their democratic rights

Meanwhile, the strategies employed by pioneering Generals such as Robert E. Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson are still studied at military academies today And the techniques of Total War and trench warfare would be hugely, horribly influential in the century that followed the American Civil War.

The conflict is undoubtedly the most pivotal, single event in American history It reinforced the identity of the United States' Union, and resolved once and for all the question of whether the US was one nation or a collection of separate states. What didn't kill the country undoubtedly made it stronger, and even when certain citizens still pledge allegiance to the South, or even to the Confederate flag, today, they'll be quick to point out something else: above all, they're proud to be Americans.

The ART of WAR

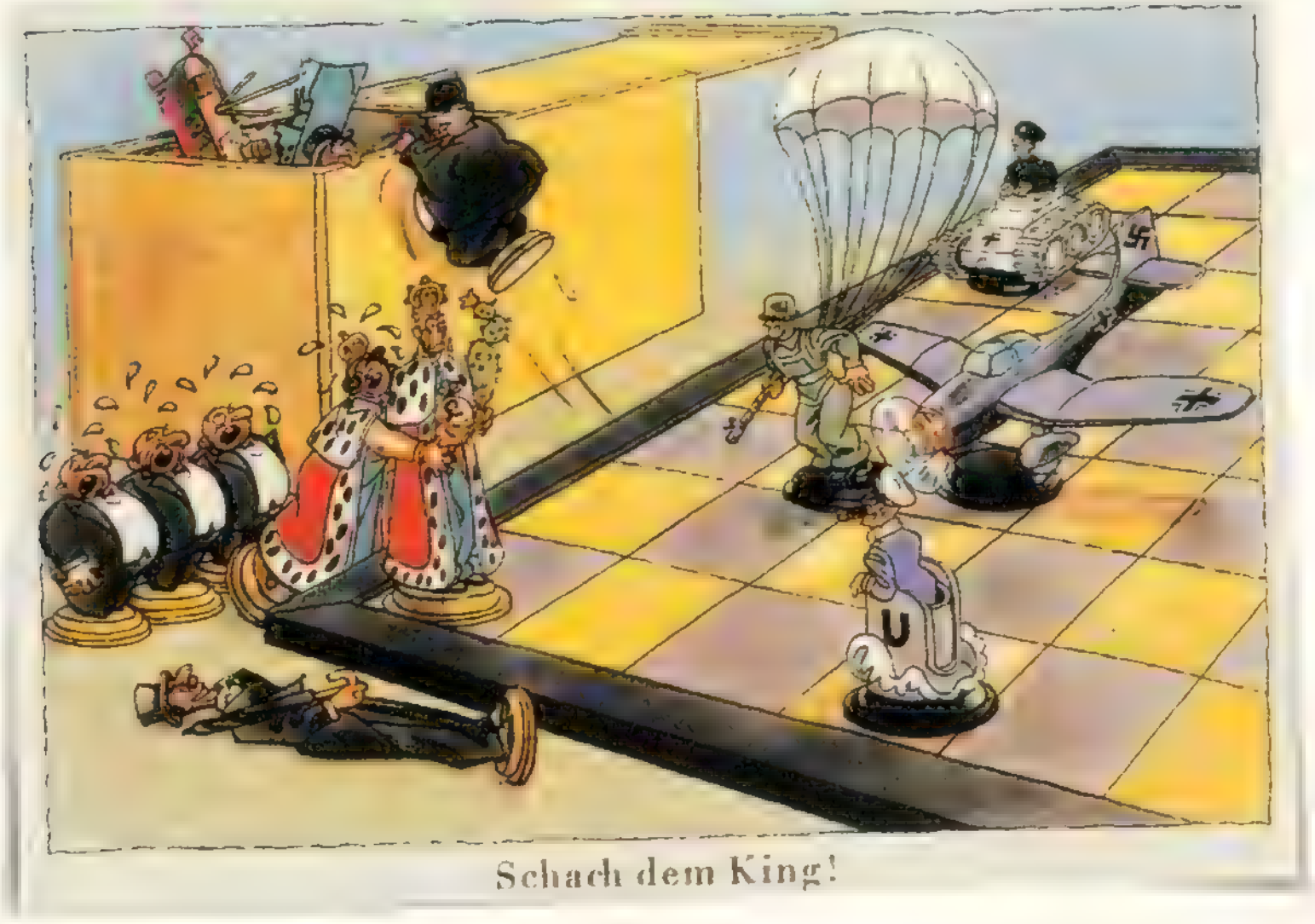
WORLD WAR II IN CARTOONS

Compiled by Mark Bryant, a new pictorial history of the Second World War provides a surprisingly comprehensive account of the politics and events of this period...

Humour, it seems, can be found in even the most desperate of situations, as the satire and lampoonery, along with the occasional unintentional hilarity of propaganda, published during wartime and pre-war periods show. When laid out sequentially, the cartoons reproduced in Mark Bryant's new book, *World War II in Cartoons*, ably depict the attitudes and shifting fortunes of that particular conflict.

Some are light-hearted, some are a motivational call to arms, some are bitingly satirical, and some are clearly filled with rage, showing, as they do, some gross racial stereotypes. But what they all share is an intent and a desire to put across a specific message that is welded to the ideology of the creator or the publication.

The old adage of a picture being worth a thousand words is confirmed here, with many of the single-frame illustrations speaking volumes. They also show that this often-dismissed art form has, and always will have, the potential to ruffle the feathers of the power elite.



▲ **GERMAN PROPAGANDA POSTER** c1940

With Britain alone and on the defensive, the Axis nations took every opportunity to lampoon the once-mighty empire. "Check to the King" has George VI in the last corner of a chess board, hemmed in by paratroopers, U-boats, Stuka dive-bombers and a panzer tank. Churchill can be seen hurrying to join the Royal Navy and merchant marine ships already removed from the board, while Chamberlain lies flat-out and three Jewish plutocrats shed buckets of tears.

NEWSPAPER CARTOON
CLIFFORD BERRYMAN,
WASHINGTON STAR,
9 OCTOBER 1939

The Nazi-Soviet Pact of Non-Aggression, signed on 23 August 1939, shook the Allies, who had been negotiating with the Soviet Union themselves. It was doubly surprising considering Hitler's own words reviling communism in *Mein Kampf*. The Pulitzer prize-winning cartoonist of the *Washington Star*, Clifford Berryman (1869-1949) has Hitler and Stalin getting married, with the latter as an apparently satisfied bride.

Rendezvous

NEWSPAPER CARTOON
DAVID LOW,
EVENING STANDARD,
20 SEPTEMBER 1939

The German Army invaded Poland at 4.45am on 1 September 1939. Unable to resist the German Blitzkrieg (lightning war), the Poles were also faced with a separate invasion by the Soviet Union on 17 September. The occupation of Poland was soon complete, and Hitler and Stalin divided the country between them. In David Low's famous cartoon, "Rendezvous", the two unlikely allies congratulate each other over the body of Poland.

The triumphant English retreat
Buriko, *Il 420*, 1940

▲ **NEWSPAPER CARTOON** BURIKO, *Il 420*, 1940

After the occupation of the Low Countries and the drive through the Ardennes Forest, the German forces made short work of Allied resistance in northern France, and by 26 May the British Expeditionary Force and what was left of the other Allied armies in the northern sector were bottled up in the port of Dunkirk. Miraculously, instead of the 30,000 troops they expected to save, the Royal Navy, aided by a vast flotilla of small craft from Britain, managed to rescue ten times that number of Allied troops. Not unnaturally, the Axis interpretation of events was somewhat different, as this Italian cartoon bears witness. The image of an army fighting a brilliant rearguard action is nowhere to be seen in Buriko's drawing of galloping retreat.

Humpty Dumpty and the Roman Wall
E.H. Shepard, *Punch*, 8 May 1940

▶ **NEWSPAPER CARTOON**
E. H. SHEPARD, *PUNCH*, 8 MAY 1940

Italy declared war on the Allies on June 1940, after considerable courting by both sides. In Shepard's drawing, Goebbels is about to pull an anxious-looking Mussolini into the wasteland of Germany, where his future is uncertain. By contrast, the Allied side has a soft landing assured, and the garden is blooming. Ernest H. Shepard (1879-1972) is perhaps best remembered today for his illustrations to *Winnie-The-Pooh* and *The Wind In The Willows*, but he was also a regular contributor to *Punch* from 1902.

▲ **GERMAN PROPAGANDA POSTER** c1940

The Luftwaffe's Blitz on London began on 7 September 1940, and bombing soon extended to include all the major ports and industrial areas of Britain – Coventry being particularly badly hit. The destruction was enormous. This German poster for Belgium has Churchill broadcasting words of confidence while all around him the world collapses in ruins (*Madame La Marquise* was a popular song at the time).

▼ GREEK PROPAGANDA POSTER EDGAR LONGMAN, c1941

After the failure of the Italian invasion of Greece, Hitler decided to launch his own all-out attack, Operation Marita. The Germans eventually smashed through the Metaxas Line and were in Athens by 27 April 1941. This Greek poster has an inspiring, though perhaps futile, message: 'The Nazi monster is just too big to be stopped by this flesh wound'.

Edgar Longman, Greek poster, c1941

▲ ***COLLIER'S* COVER** ARTHUR SZYK, 12 DECEMBER 1942
The sudden attack by Japanese aircraft on the US Pacific fleet moored in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Sunday 7 December 1941 completely stunned the United States and the rest of the world. The immediate effect of the raid was to rally a divided America into a declaration of war on Japan. On 11 December, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, and WWII became truly global. Arthur Szyk shows a gruesome vampire bat hovering over Hawaii on the first-anniversary *Collier's* cover.

This feature is an edited extract from Mark Bryant's book *World War II in Cartoons*, published by Grub Street, RRP £12
It is available from www.grubstreet.co.uk

HERE come the TOMMIES!

First World War: With the first shots fired, Britain declared war and despatched its armed forces to halt the German advance on the Western Front. Adrian Gilbert tracks the deployment of troops during those brief pre-trench days...

August 1914 – the first ships steamed into the English Channel, and during the next week over 80,000 soldiers and 30,000 horses of the BEF crossed to France. Protected by the Royal Navy, the transports – with officers on deck and the men packed in the hold – sailed for the ports of Boulogne, Le Havre and Rouen.

The 2nd Grenadier Guards – part of the 4th (Guards) Brigade – sailed to Le Havre on the night of 12/13 August, an incident-free passage described by Major Lord Bernard Gordon-Lennox: "We sauntered quietly across the Channel, which was like a mill-pond, and awoke to find a lovely morning and out of sight of land. We kept on slowly and as we neared the French coast, we went close by several fishing boats and trawlers, the crews of which waved frantically at us and cheered us to the echo."

The enthusiasm shown by the French for the British arrival was almost universal. Among the welcoming crowd were French Territorial soldiers, second-line troops whose ill-fitting uniforms of bright-red trousers and blue coats surprised and amused the British soldiers as they disembarked. Flowers were pressed on the British officers, and drinks of all kinds offered to the men; while among the younger female civilians a mania developed for souvenir-hunting, with cap badges and buttons the most prized objects.

After disembarking at Le Havre, the Guards made their way to a rest camp above the port, described by Gordon-Lennox: "It was the hottest march I have ever done and hope ever shall. Our rest camp was about five miles off, and our way led us through numerous docks into the town. Here, we had an even more enthusiastic welcome than ever, the inhabitants crowding around us and throwing flowers at us with the usual cries. With the Sun on our backs and no air, everyone felt the heat very much, and the men started falling out, a few at first and then more. The inhabitants, in their kindness, were responsible for a good deal of this, as they persisted in giving the men drinks, among which was a very acrid form of cider, which had dire results. I have never seen march discipline so lax before, and hope I never shall again."

The Guards were not the only troops to suffer in this way. On their march to the rest camp, the 4th Royal Fusiliers had ▶

WAR HORSES
IN 1917, THE BRITISH ARMY HAD SOME 870,000 HORSES IN SERVICE. THIS WAS A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD THAT SAW HORSES PHASED OUT FROM CAVALRY CHARGES AND USED MORE FOR LOGISTICAL SUPPORT.

Among the welcoming crowd were French Territorial soldiers, whose ill-fitting uniforms surprised and amused the British

After crossing the Channel, British troops undertook gruelling march in the French heat

97 men fall out, most of them reservists unused to the rigours of marching in the Sun. The weather throughout August – and into September – was especially hard on the infantry: hot, humid conditions broken by intense rainstorms

Dangerous adventure

A select group crossed to France not on water but in the air. The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) had only come into being in 1912, and at the onset of hostilities deployed just four squadrons, with a total of 41 serviceable aircraft. The squadrons were ordered to assemble at Dover before flying to France. Aviation was in its infancy and every flight was still a dangerous adventure. Several aircraft crashed on their way to Dover – with two flyers killed – before the first wave of three squadrons took off from the Dover cliffs at dawn on 13 August.

The pilots and their aircraft were the cutting edge of the RFC, supported by the ground crews and administrative staff who went by sea. Before their departure, Lieutenant Louis Strange, a newly qualified pilot, recalled the odd sight of the requisitioned civilian transport vehicles: "The headquarters stores lorry was a huge, covered red van, with Bovril painted in black letters all over it; we may have laughed when we saw it go off, but we later blessed it because it was so easy to spot from the air on the frequent occasions we lost our transport. Our bomb lorry was originally destined for the peaceful

British ships journeyed across the English Channel in wet conditions, arriving in France completely unscathed

UP AND AWAY

THE TERM "DOGFIGHT" ORIGINATED IN WWI AS A RESULT OF PILOTS TURNING OFF THEIR PLANE'S ENGINE WHEN PERFORMING TIGHT TURNS TO PREVENT A STALL, AND A BARKING SOUND BEING PRODUCED WHEN IT WAS RESTARTED.

pursuit of propagating the sale of Lazenby's Sauce (The World's Appetizer), while Peak Frean's Biscuits, Stephens' Blue-Black Ink and the ubiquitous Carter Patterson were also represented."

Strange followed the main force a few days later. He flew a Henri Farman F.20, a two-seat biplane with an 80hp engine capable of 60mph, a respectable speed for an aircraft of the time. But with a passenger, his kit and a Lewis light machine gun stowed on board, plus a head wind, the 70-mile flight to the assembly point at Dover took two-and-a-half hours, amounting to an average speed of just 28mph. Strange's flight to France was not without incident, either.

Landing on the bumpy airfield above Dover Castle on the afternoon of 15 August, Strange broke a longeron, which he replaced during the night – only completing the repair job at 6am. Making matters more difficult was the realisation that his transport driver passenger, terrified of flying, had fortified his resolve with large quantities of whisky. Before departure, he had to be tracked down to a public house in the town, and then ordered onto the aircraft, which took off at midday with weather conditions deteriorating Strange's crossing to Gris Nez took a full 45 minutes.

"I had some worried moments over the water," he recalled. As the visibility was not more than about half a mile, and no shipping was to be seen, I began to wonder whether I was not running up alongside the coast of Belgium. Suddenly, the visibility became even worse, and when I eventually sighted the grey cliffs of Gris Nez, they were only a few hundred yards away. But a sharp right-hand bank took me clear of the cliffs, and then I hugged the coastline down to Boulogne, where I ran into better weather. Although I encountered a couple of hard rainstorms later, I was able to make Amiens comfortably in about two-and-a-half hours' flying time. I shall never forget taxiing up to the other machines that Sunday afternoon. The thousands of Frenchmen congregated around the aerodrome at Amiens put me in mind of a Hendon pageant, but the illusion vanished when the machine came to a standstill, because, much to my astonishment, my passenger stood up and answered the cheers of the crowd with much gusto and saluted the Entente Cordiale by waving aloft another empty bottle of whisky. At that moment, my eye caught sight of Major Higgins, my commanding officer. I thought that the 56 days Field Punishment No. 1 subsequently meted out to him rather hard luck under the circumstances."

Forced landings

Several other flights from England suffered forced landings and as the RFC prepared to fly on to Maubeuge, a B.E.8 crashed over the aerodrome at Amiens,

The initial march to the rest camp was hampered not only by the searing heat, but also by the [illegible] older aforementioned [illegible]

Crime and punishment

Field Punishment No. 1 was introduced into Army life in the late 19th Century after flogging was abolished in 1881. Intended to deal with minor offences and act as a deterrent, it was no less brutal or humiliating than what it replaced.

Offending soldiers were tied to a fixed object or post for two hours each day of their sentence (one hour in the morning and another in the afternoon), sometimes in a cruciform style. Later on, in 1917, the War Office produced guidelines that instructed officers to make the post offenders were lashed to look "entirely unlike the Cross". To add to the brutality, offenders were often placed facing enemy lines to give the impression that they were in range of enemy fire. Sometimes, they were.

As with most aspects of military discipline, Field Punishment No. 1 was staunchly defended by its proponents and carried on into the late 1920s. After questions were asked in the House of Commons, Sir Douglas Haig stated that the punishment sent out the right signals, and that the stigma was good for the offender.

Field Punishment No. 2 was similar, with the offender handcuffed and fettered but not fixed to anything, so he could still march.

killing both crewmen. Yet, despite their unreliability, fragility and the modest numbers involved, aircraft would be of vital importance to the outcome of the 1914 campaign.

The aircraft of the RFC had immediately proved their worth during the 1912 army manoeuvres. Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson, one of the corps commanders involved, was sufficiently taken by the speed and accuracy of the intelligence supplied by aircraft to write: "The impression left on my mind is that their use has revolutionised the art of war. So long as hostile aircraft are hovering over one's troops, all movements are liable to be seen and reported, and therefore the first step in war will be to get rid of the hostile aircraft."

These would prove prophetic words. Reconnaissance remained aviation's chief function, but the realisation of the aircraft's full military potential would not be long in coming. The Italian-Turkish War (1911-12), fought in Libya, had been closely observed by the staffs of the major European armies for the innovations made in aerial observation for artillery, aerial photography, the dropping of propaganda leaflets and even bombing. As for Grierson's demand for aircraft to counter the activities of hostile machines, those sent over to France by the RFC remained unarmed, but aircrew carried revolvers and rifles to take pot shots at their adversaries. Louis Strange wanted to take things further, however, developing an improvised mounting for his new Lewis machine gun. Once German planes were sighted, he hoped to use it in earnest.

FIGHTING FIRSTS
WWI SAW MANY WEAPONS USED ON THE BATTLEFIELD FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE GERMANS EMPLOYED FLAME-THROWERS, WHILE TEAR GAS WAS INTRODUCED BY THE FRENCH IN AUGUST 1914.

Aircraft sent over to France by the RFC remained unarmed, but air crew carried revolvers and rifles to take pot shots at their adversaries

When the BEF left for France, a personal message was issued to every man from the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener. Both an exhortation and a warning, it reminded the soldier to do his duty, be on his best behaviour and resist the temptations of "wine and women".

Rallying the troops

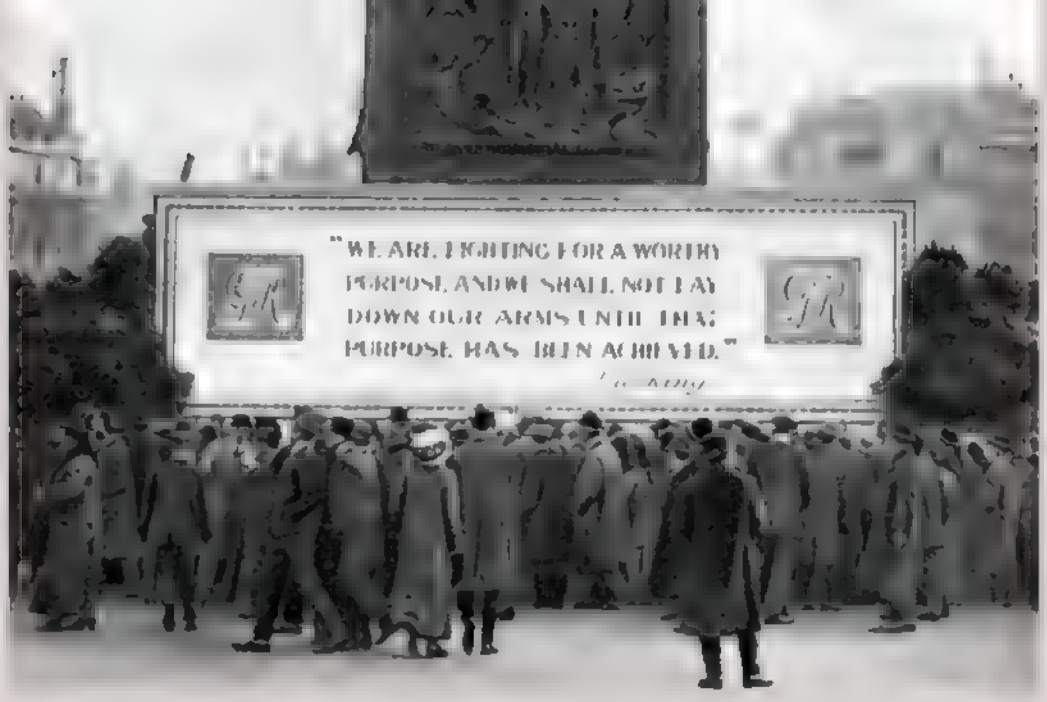
Other, more bellicose messages were delivered by senior officers during the voyage. Lieutenant Henry Slingsby – of the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI), part of the 5th Division's 13th Brigade – was sternly warned by Brigadier-General G.J. Cuthbert of his duty in the approaching hostilities: "Remember that no officer or man of the 13th Infantry Brigade is to surrender." The divisional commander, Major-General Sir Charles Fergusson, was keyed up to fever pitch a few days later when he addressed the battalion. The KOYLI War Diary reported his message that "there must be no surrendering, and men must fight to the last, with their fists if their rifles are useless. That he would be found with them in the last ditch." Within a week, however, Fergusson would be tamely retiring from the battlefield, his division in disarray.

Such rabble-rousing speeches tended to reflect the uncertainties of the officers making them, and as far as the other

ranks were concerned, they seldom impressed. Corporal John Lucy of the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles recalled how, on the cross-Channel voyage, his fellow soldiers were lectured by an officer "who told the men in melodramatic fashion that the Kaiser had a grasping hand outstretched to seize them, but that the hand was a withered hand. This speech had not quite the effect intended, for it was a source of amusement for the troops for many days, during which we heard humorous and dramatic references to withered hands." These pep talks, Lucy concluded, "raised only critical or cynical feelings".

Lucy arrived in France on 14 August, and after his battalion had assembled at Rouen, it joined the remainder of the BEF in the train journey across northern France to the concentration area between Maubeuge and Le Cateau. Here, the units of the BEF would form up into the brigades and divisions that would support the French Fifth Army. As the trains advanced eastwards, the troops were greeted by cheering civilians at every stop. Lucy eventually found the attentions exhausting: "These French civilians were too excitable by far, and rather upsetting. Had we given them all they demanded as souvenirs, we should have eventually fought naked at Mons, armed only with flowers and bon-bons."

Within the concentration area, there was a rest period of a few days as the BEF placed itself on a war footing. Aubrey Herbert, a civilian attached to the Irish Guards, described the relaxed atmosphere of the time: "The men had fraternised with the people and, to the irritation of the Colonel, wore flowers in their hair and caps. There was no drunkenness – in fact, the men complained that there was nothing strong enough to make a man drunk." Troops helped the local women bring in the harvest (their menfolk already away at the front), while attempts were made to toughen up the reservists with route marches. During their free time, the men played football while recovering from brutal inoculations against typhus.



Attempts were made by the British Government to rally soldiers and civilians alike to the cause. This recruitment poster was erected in London's Trafalgar Square

Quiet triumph

The mobilisation of the BEF, its voyage over the Channel (without a single casualty) and rail transfer to the concentration area had been swift and efficient, a quiet triumph of staff work. An effective staff system was obviously essential to the proper working of the army, and once in France the high command and its staff became part of the General Headquarters (GHQ) under Field Marshal Sir John French. GHQ was composed of three branches, each divided into a number of sections. The task of supplying the BEF with food, munitions, transport and other equipment was the responsibility of the Quartermaster General's branch (Q), while the Adjutant General's branch (A) dealt with military personnel, which included the movement of troops to the front, disciplinary matters, soldiers' pay, prisoners of war, as well as medical services and casualties.

Both Q and A branches had performed strongly up to this point, and were to do so for the remainder of the campaign. This would not, however, be the case with the third branch, that of the General Staff (G), whose function was to provide direct military support to the Commander-in-Chief. Under the control of the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, G branch was divided into an intelligence section (I), responsible for gleaning information about the enemy, and an operations section (O), whose role was to prepare and deliver the orders for the direction of the BEF in the field. In continental Europe, the concept of a general staff that initiated military doctrine, and directed the deployment and movement of large armies, was well established. In Britain, with its ►

Rabble-rousing speeches tended to reflect the uncertainties of the officers making them, and seldom impressed the other ranks

Corporal John Lucy of the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles described the attention of the French civilians as "too exhausting by far"

WFRONT LIFE ALTHOUGH THERE WERE SOME LOCAL SUCCESSES, TRENCH WARFARE ON THE WESTERN FRONT WAS A VIRTUAL STALEMATE, AND BECAUSE OF ENEMY SNIPERS, ANY TROOP MOVEMENT TOOK PLACE AT NIGHT.

background of fighting small colonial wars, this had not been the case, and it was only in 1906 that the General Staff had come into being. Its influence was limited, however, forced to compete with the a ready-established Q and A branches. It also suffered from the belief held by many commanders that staff officers should not have a directing role in the conduct of operations, but should simply convey the wishes of the Commander-in-Chief

Whatever the feelings of senior officers, the demand for capable staff officers in 1914 was greater than the supply. The shortage was underlined by the situation found in Haig's I Corps – the only properly constituted corps formation in the British Army – when the intelligence officer Colonel John Charteris encountered one of the new staff officers assigned to the corps. In a letter to his wife, Charteris wrote: "Colonel X, who has recently blossomed into a staff officer, consulted me very confidentially. 'You know all about the Army – tell me, how many battalions are there in a division?'"

Each division in peacetime was allotted two trained staff officers, augmented to six on the outbreak of war. But according to Colonel J.E. Edmonds, the senior staff officer of the 4th Division (and subsequently the Official Historian), those assigned to his division were either incompetent or lacked interest in their appointment. On assuming command of the Cavalry Division, Major-General Edmund Allenby discovered that he had no permanent staff officers at all, and had to quickly improvise a staff from men with limited experience. These failings would rebound on the BEF when it came to grips with the German Army.

During the late 19th Century, the Army had been reorganised on the basis of the Cardwell system, which, with a few exceptions, combined two regular battalions into a single regiment.

The BEF began to land around northern France, assembling Maubeuge and Le Cateau, forming into the brigades and divisions that would support the French Fifth Army

GUN RATIONS

UPON LANDING IN FRANCE, EACH BEF INFANTRY BATTALION AND CAVALRY REGIMENT WAS EQUIPPED WITH JUST TWO VICKERS OR MAXIM MACHINE GUNS. THIS WAS DUE TO THE COST AND AMOUNT OF TRAINING NEEDED TO OPERATE THEM.

One battalion was stationed abroad for extended periods, leaving the home battalion to supply a stream of trained reinforcements to the overseas battalion

The system worked well enough for the maintenance of Britain's colonial garrisons, but the geographically scattered home battalions (invariably understrength) did not provide an effective tool for the exercise of command, even after the development of a six-division BEF in the early years of the 20th century. The large-scale manoeuvres that would have tested senior officers were infrequent. The units of a divisional command were brought together for six weeks of the year, with just four days spent in manoeuvres against an opposing formation.

Training facilities were limited, too, with the Army often forced to negotiate with private landowners on an ad hoc basis for areas in which to conduct tactical exercises. Some idea of the difficult circumstances affecting training can be seen in a simple diary entry made by the commander of the 10th Infantry Brigade, Aymer Haldane. He was forced to conduct a battalion exercise on the golf course at Hythe, and helpfully noted: "Machine-gun fire. To represent this, a biscuit tin hammered with a drumstick is good."

With or without suitable training opportunities, Britain's Generals did not inspire great confidence. Apart from their personal strengths and weaknesses, the system tended to encourage a restrictive approach to command. According to Martin Samuels, British military doctrine considered the conduct of war as inherently structured, and "effectiveness was seen as being achieved through the maintenance of order". Even if Samuels has over-emphasised the distinctions between British and German operational theory, the British outlook stressed a

Lieutenant Louis Strange

Louis Strange was not only a talented pilot but also possessed a creative mind that helped drive forward the development of the fledgling Royal Flying Corps during a period where aircraft became gradually more sophisticated and the nature of air war was changing.

Even though his initial assignments in 1914 consisted of observing troop movements, he did so with a Lewis machine gun fitted to his plane, and soon after developed a safety strap to enable the observer to stand up in the cockpit and fire the machine gun in front and behind.

Strange also developed bombing techniques after deeming the lines of German troops he was observing to be "too tempting". Initially, he and his observer would drop crude petrol bombs over the side, later developing their techniques sufficiently to carry out one of the first ever tactical bombing missions. This sortie in early 1915 dropped three 35lb bombs on Courtrai railway station, causing 75 casualties and a three-day closure of the station. It also earned Strange the Military Cross – his first of many honours in a distinguished military career.

The British troops were enthusiastically welcomed into France with locals eager to procure souvenirs from the soldiers

British pilots of B-Flight, 3 Squadron RFC, relax in the mess at Larkhill in Wiltshire, awaiting a call to action

Getty Images

strict obedience to orders within a tightly controlled operational framework. As a consequence, commanders lacked the flexibility to respond to the inevitable unforeseen circumstances.

Deepening pessimism

GHQ crossed over to France on 14 August and took up position in the town of Le Cateau, while Field Marshal French and his immediate staff went by train to Paris to meet the French President and War Minister, before driving by motor car to the French General Headquarters (GQG) at Vitry-le-François near Reims. There, he was introduced to General Joseph Joffre, the French Commander in-Chief. Fortunately for Anglo-French relations, both men got on well, forming a mutual respect that would prove vital in negotiating the coming campaign.

From Reims, French travelled northwards on the 17th to the HQ of Fifth Army at Rethel to rendezvous with its commander, General Charles Lanrezac. This meeting went badly,

With or without suitable training opportunities, Britain's generals did not inspire confidence

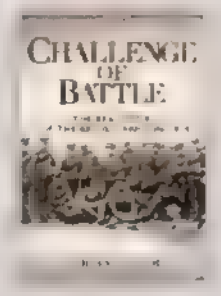
however. Lanrezac was one of the few French Generals who correctly foresaw that the main German thrust would be made against the French left, thus leaving his army outnumbered and potentially outflanked. His concern translated into a deepening pessimism, combined with an irritation with the British, based on the unfounded assumption that the BEF had been slow in arriving to support his left flank.

The BEF's commander possessed only schoolboy French, which made the meeting without proper translators present especially fraught. According to the version of the meeting assembled by Lieutenant E.L. Spears (the British liaison officer at Fifth Army), Field Marshal French, struggling with some difficult pronunciation, asked if he thought the Germans would cross the River Meuse at the town of Huy. "Lanrezac shrugged his shoulders impatiently. 'Tell the Marshal,' he said curtly, 'that, in my opinion, the Germans have merely gone to the Meuse to fish.'" Beyond Lanrezac's sarcasm, the meeting was further undermined by confusion over the deployment of British cavalry and the actual date when the BEF would be fully operational. As a result of these misunderstandings, both armies, although deployed side-by-side, would operate and fight separately.

On leaving Lanrezac's headquarters, French drove to British GHQ at Le Cateau. On arrival, he was informed of the fatal heart attack suffered by II Corps commander Lieutenant-General Grierson. French telegraphed London asking for Sir Hubert Plumer to be sent out as Grierson's replacement, but Kitchener spitefully despatched General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien instead, well aware of the antipathy between the two men. French did, however, receive some good news. On 19 August, the 4th Division, previously held back in England, was released for service in France, and four battalions of infantry originally assigned to act as line-of-communication troops were combined as the 19th Infantry Brigade for frontline use. Buoyed up by this knowledge, French prepared to lead his troops into battle.

During the journey through the French towns, the atmosphere was relaxed, with soldiers socialising with, and helping out, the locals

Rex Features



This feature is an edited extract from *Challenge Of Battle* by Adrian Gilbert. The book is published in hardback and paperback by Osprey Publishing: www.ospreypublishing.com

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TRIGGER POINT

THE START OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND TROUBLES

Many of us will recall the barrage of news stories as bombs and gunfire destroyed lives in Northern Ireland during the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties. As Tom Fordy explains, the causes of the violence date back hundreds of years...

THOUGH THEY WERE A CONFLICT fought mostly in and for Northern Ireland, The Troubles became a prominent part of the entire British public's consciousness for 30 years. They were also the focus of the British armed forces' longest-running major campaign – sparked by a civil-rights march that turned to violence in Londonderry on 5 October 1968. But for the people of Ireland, tensions between Catholic and Protestant communities, and over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, date back hundreds of years, many of them stained with bloodshed.

The English first laid claim to Irish land in the 12th Century, when King Henry II declared Lordship over Ireland – helping Pope Alexander's efforts to establish authority over the Irish church. Over the next several hundred years, however, English rule and ownership would be restricted to an area around Dublin called "The Pale". In 1542, Henry VIII sought to assert control, making himself the monarch of the newly created Kingdom of Ireland.

While Henry had initiated Protestant Reformation in England, he was less successful in Ireland. And despite the theoretical rule of the Crown, maintaining authority over Irish chieftains proved to be difficult. There were numerous uprisings, the most famous of which were the Desmond Rebellions (1569-73 and 1579-83) during the reign of Elizabeth I.

By the 1590s, the English all but dominated Ireland – the only obstacle that remained was the northern province of Ulster, the most Gaelic of them all, and the stronghold of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. Though previously an enforcer for the Crown, O'Neill aligned with the powerful chieftain Hugh Roe O'Donnell and, in 1595, led a rebellion that became the Nine Years' War.

There were several major victories for the Irish rebellion, most notably the Battle of the Yellow Ford on 14 August 1598, during which the English suffered their worst ever defeat on Irish soil when rebels ambushed them on their march to Armagh – up to 2,000 English troops were killed or deserted. O'Neill told his men that, "Victory lay not in senseless armour but in courageous souls." The following year, he wrote to Queen Elizabeth with terms for a peace agreement: a self governing Ireland, the return of confiscated land, and freedom of movement for Catholicism.

UP TO 2,000 ENGLISH TROOPS WERE KILLED OR DESERTED

However, it was the aftermath of the Nine Years' War, culminating with the defeat of O'Neill's rebellion at the Siege of Kinsale in 1601-02, that laid the foundations for the sectarianism that would later characterise the Northern Ireland Troubles.

After their defeat, O'Neill, O'Donnell and many of the Ulster chieftains fled to Spain, ▶

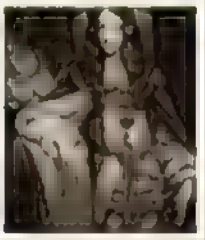
Getty Images

A young girl skips past patrolling British soldiers from the Gloucester Regiment, Belfast, 1972. The presence of armed forces on residential streets became a daily occurrence during the Troubles

KEY FIGURES

HUGH O'NEILL, EARL OF TYRONE

A powerful Irish chieftain who fought alongside the English but revolted when he realised that Elizabeth I wouldn't give him authority over Ulster. O'Neill fled to Spain after his defeat in the Nine Years' War, vowing to return and take back Ireland. However, he remained in exile until his death in 1616.



WILLIAM III OF ORANGE

Stadtholder of Holland and eventual King of England, Scotland and Ireland. William overthrew his Catholic father-in-law, James II, in what was called England's "Glorious Revolution". He remains a prominent, even mythical, figure in Protestantism. The Protestant organisation the Orange Order is named in his honour.

CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

An Irish nationalist politician and founder of the Irish Parliamentary Party. A staunch believer in an independent, self-governing Ireland, it was Parnell who first convinced the British Prime Minister to consider passing the Home Rule bill. It would be another 16 years before the bill was passed, by which time Parnell had died.

MICHAEL COLLINS

A participant in the Easter Rising and, later, a prominent figure in the Irish revolution. An elected member of Sinn Féin, Collins boycotted Westminster alongside other Sinn Féin MPs and created an Irish Parliament, effectively starting the Irish War of Independence. He was killed in the Irish Civil War.

SIR JAMES CRAIG

An Ulster Unionist politician who went on to become Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister. Craig was a member of the Orange Order and believed in keeping Catholic politics in the south – in the north, he championed the continuation of a parliament dominated by Protestants. Craig was still Prime Minister when he died in 1940.

TERENCE O'NEILL

Prime Minister of Northern Ireland when The Troubles began. After the violence that marred the 1968 civil-rights march in Londonderry, O'Neill was summoned to Britain and warned that if he could not contain the situation, British forces would step in. He resigned in April 1969 when bomb attacks on Belfast's water supply put the city into crisis.

Getty Images

This hand-coloured wood engraving depicts William III of Orange (left) at the Battle of the Boyne, a pivotal event in Irish history

and the English seized most of the land. By 1609, King James I had begun to colonise Ulster with Protestant settlers from Scotland and England. The Plantation of Ulster, as it's commonly known, caused inevitable conflict between the native Catholics and Protestant settlers in the province.

In 1641, the native Irish Catholics staged a rebellion against English rule. It failed, but left thousands of English and Scottish Protestant settlers dead and started the Irish Confederate Wars, also known as the Eleven Years' War (part of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, the most famous of which is the English Civil War). In 1642, the Confederate Catholics of Ire and were formed to organise the Catholic campaign, but the Confederates were ultimately defeated by Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army. The wars resulted in a huge loss of life for Irish Catholics, and yet more land confiscated for English Protestants.

Over the next 35 years, there was significant change. The English, Scottish and Irish monarchies were restored. Charles II converted to Catholicism on his deathbed, and his successor, younger brother James II of England and VII of Scotland, became the three kingdoms' last Catholic monarch. James tried to introduce laws to give freedom to Catholics, and even had a Catholic son in 1688, causing unrest among the people. Eventually, Parliament conspired with James' son-in-law, William III of Orange, to overthrow the King.

When William and his army arrived from Holland, James retreated to the Emerald Isle, starting the Williamite War in Ireland. Its most famous event is the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690, a crushing victory for the Protestant "King Billy", and a turning point in his eventual defeat of James. It was a significant event in the history of tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities, and is still memorialised on Orangemen's Day every 12 July.

> GUNBOATS FIRED AT THE REBELS FROM THE RIVER LIFFEY. THE FIGHTING LASTED FIVE DAYS AND CLAIMED OVER 400 LIVES

In the years that followed, English Protestants took control of 90 per cent of Ireland. Laws were passed to marginalise and discriminate against Catholics – among numerous restrictions, they were prevented from buying land, from voting and from entering legal professions.

The modern history leading to The Troubles began in 1912 when, after over 100 years of being governed by British Parliament, a Home Rule bill was passed – by 1914, Ireland had its own government and autonomy. Protestants in Ulster were resistant to the idea of Home Rule, fearful that Catholic politicians would dominate an Irish parliament. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) militia formed and reportedly smuggled 20,000 rifles into Ulster, ready to resist efforts by the British Government to impose Home Rule. Rival militia groups – known as the Irish Volunteers – also formed to oppose the UVF.

To avoid violence, the Partition of Ireland was conceived, whereby the six predominantly Protestant counties in the north of Ire and would remain part of Great Britain, and the rest of the country would become a separate, self-governed country. This solution, which was officially introduced in 1920, created the ethno-nationalist divide between the Catholic Republicans, who wanted Northern Ireland to unite with the rest of Ireland, and the Protestant Loyalists, who wanted to stay British.

Before this, however, in April 1916, close to a thousand Irish Volunteers attempted to proclaim an Irish Republic in the Easter Rising rebellion. Led by Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, they seized Dublin's General Post Office on Easter Monday. British gunboats arrived in Dublin and began firing at the rebels from the River Liffey. The fighting lasted five days and claimed over 400 lives. The rebels who had fought during the Easter Rising inspired the formation of the original Irish Republican Army, or IRA.

"It was a revolution driven by romance more than reality," Irish politician Michael McDowell later said. "One in which those who died became patriots, and those who didn't became prisoners."

1542

Crown of Ireland Act
Henry VIII declares himself head of the new Kingdom of Ireland, and takes the power from Irish Lords in exchange for titles.

1601-02

Siege of Kinsale
English forces end the Nine Years' War when they defeat the Irish rebellion and a fleet of Spanish troops who have arrived to help the Catholic cause.

1609

Plantation of Ulster
There is a mass settlement in Ulster by English and Scottish Protestants, who confiscate land from the natives and propagate Protestantism.

1653

End of the 11 Years' War
Not content with overthrowing the English monarchy, Oliver Cromwell defeats the Confederate Catholics of Ireland and crushes their rebellion.

1690

Battle of the Boyne
William III of Orange defeats James II in the "Williamite War", it is arguably the most significant and celebrated Protestant victory over Catholics in the history of Ireland.

Indeed, 15 of the rebels were later executed, and the remainder – including future IRA leader Michael Collins – were imprisoned. The executions led to a rise in support for the Sinn Féin political party, which swept the Irish polls in the 1918 General Election.

Guerrilla war

In January 1919, the IRA and self-declared Irish Parliament instigated the War of Independence against the British Army, a guerrilla war in which the IRA used similar ambush-and-run tactics that Hugh O'Neill had used against the English in the Nine Years' War centuries earlier. A ceasefire was called in July 1921 and, in December that year, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed, legalising the Partition of Ireland and establishing the Irish Free State as a self-governing dominion.

However, among the Irish Volunteers, opinion on the Partition was split. Those who supported it were named the Free State Soldiers, while those who didn't were named the Irregulars. Violence erupted between them, creating a civil war that lasted for over a year. Hundreds were killed, including Michael Collins, who had become leader of the Free State Soldiers.

In December 1948, the Irish Free State was finally granted independence. It became the Republic of Ireland, while the six counties that made up Northern Ireland remained part of Great Britain.

If the constitutional status of Northern Ireland formed the basis of The Troubles, the religious tensions were the catalyst. By the mid-1960s, the Northern Irish Government was dominated by a loyalist party, and many of the discriminatory laws passed in the 1800s were still in force – and there remained an overwhelming prejudice against the Catholics. In particular, finding employment was extremely difficult for members of the Catholic working class. As Republican activist and politician Bernadette Devlin stated in her 1969 book *The Price Of My Soul*: "You come to a factory looking for a job, and they ask you which school you went to. If its name is 'Saint Somebody', they know you're a Catholic and you don't get taken on."

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) formed and called for greater equality for not just the Catholic community but everyone – encapsulating employment and housing problems, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly.

The NICRA planned a protest march in Londonderry on 5 October 1968. "The Apprentice Boys", a Protestant fraternal society, planned to march in the same place on the same day. Consequently, all marches were banned from the area, but a few hundred NICRA members attended anyway. They were met by rows of Royal Ulster Constabulary officers, who used batons and water cannons on the protestors as violence broke out. It was captured on camera and broadcast around the world. For many, this was the day The Troubles really began.

"It wasn't a crowd-control operation," protestor and Derry Labour Party member Eamonn McCann later recalled. "If you really wanted to clear people, you wouldn't box them in at both sides. This was a punishment. The thing I remember was people saying afterwards, 'Things will never be the same again.'"

Two young boys wear balaclavas to hide their identity. Belfast, May 1981

Serious violence

In the summer of 1969, rioting had become commonplace in Derry and Belfast. The first deaths of the conflict were recorded, and the Battle of the Bogside that August gave rise to two days of serious violence between the Protestant and Catholic communities – soon, thanks to paramilitary organisations such as the UVF and the Provisional IRA (an offshoot of the original IRA), The Troubles escalated.

The British Army was sent in as a temporary solution to restore order under "Operation Banner". It would last until 2007 – nine years after the Good Friday Agreement brought an end to the sectarian conflict in 1998. By then, the conflict had claimed the lives of approximately 3,500 people. As reporter Jim McDowell later said, "Everyone was a Troubles junkie… where was the next atrocity coming from? Who was in it? Was it family? Or friends?" In some way, The Troubles have touched almost every person in Northern Ireland – their history and legacy as brutal as they are complex.

Members of the Ulster Volunteers in training, 1914

1801

Act of Union
Irish Parliament is abolished. Ireland and Great Britain are united to create the United Kingdom. This sparks a series of violent revolts.

1912

Home Rule passed
After numerous attempts, the British Government finally approves plans for a self-governing Ireland.

1916

The Irish Volunteers storm the General Post Office in Dublin and declare an Irish Republic. The rebels surrender after five days of fighting.

1920

Partition of Ireland
Northern Ireland is created when Ireland is split into two – it leads to the breakout of Irish civil war two years later.

1968

Civil-rights march
After decades of sectarianism and discrimination, a civil-rights march in Londonderry leads to violence and sparks 30 years of conflict.

Getty Images

SECRETS *of* THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Every history enthusiast owes it to themselves to see and handle the primary sources that capture the momentous events that fascinate them, and in the process gain a new and unique insight into the past...

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES IS ONE OF the richest, most fascinating and comprehensive repositories of historical documents you could hope to have access to. Within its walls are 126 miles of shelf space, packed full of documents ranging from court records, abdication papers and war reports to personal letters, 19th-century satirical cartoons and patents. Dig deeper and you'll find historical curios such as Karl Marx's application for British citizenship, Special Branch files on George Orwell, and letters from Doctor Livingstone. And if you look closer still, you can get a fresh perspective on well-known events.

The National Archives functions in a similar way to a museum, in that it procures and preserves important documents, and makes them freely available to the public: digital versions can be accessed online, or you can visit the Archives in Kew to view the physical items.

The following pages cover military events that are well known, even to those who only have a passing interest in history. But by viewing them through the perspective of the people who experienced them, these familiar engagements take on a new dimension

Hidden gems

Personal letters, such as the papers captured during the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the 1780s, can be particularly revealing. Taking a single viewpoint brings the time and place alive, and can give you a vivid feel for the period. At first glance, they may seem fairly nondescript, but they are more revealing than you expect.

Arguably, though, it's the first-hand accounts of famous conflicts that are the most satisfying to examine. The defence of Rorke's Drift in 1879, where the British Army was outnumbered by Zulus but still managed to triumph, is brought to life in a letter written by a Lieutenant of the Royal Engineers; the descriptions of attacks being "gallantly repulsed" and "splendidly met" evoke the classic stiff-upper-lipped attitude of British derring-do.

Markedly different in tone are the reports from the Battle of the Somme. The simple plan to destroy German frontlines through five days of shelling, and then walk across no-man's land to claim the shattered positions, is revealed by the minute-by-minute reports to be a horrendous lapse in judgement by the High Command, with the cold and clinical language recording objectives supposedly being achieved before the day descended into one of the bleakest in British military history.

If you fancy carrying out your own searches, head to **www.nationalarchives.gov.uk** to access the online database, or get directions to the National Archives itself in Kew.

This article is an edited extract from Richard Taylor's book *Secrets Of The National Archives*, published by Ebury Press, RRP £25. www.randomhouse.co.uk

Images of Documents © The National Archives

The LETTERS *that* NEVER ARRIVED

Documents captured in the **Anglo-Dutch Wars** from the 1780s and after

These documents are pregnant with possibilities. They are "prize papers": British, American, Spanish and Dutch letters captured from ships on their way from America to Europe, and delivered to the Prize Court of the British Admiralty. Most of them have never been opened, but those that have afford glimpses into people's day-to-day lives. There are business letters, love letters, humdrum commerce, and simple letters home. Many of the addresses they were being sent to still exist today

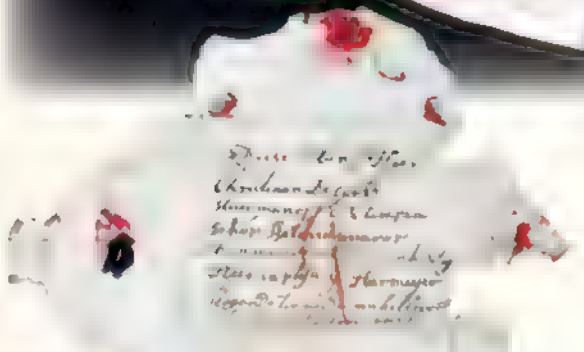
One such envelope was sending home seeds – 32 different species in 40 small packets, stored in a red, leather-bound notebook. The seeds had been collected by Jan Teerlink, a Dutch merchant, during a trip to the Dutch East Indies and China in 1803. On his return journey, with a cargo of tea and salt, his vessel Henriette was captured by

Most of them have never been opened, but those that have afford glimpses into people's everyday lives

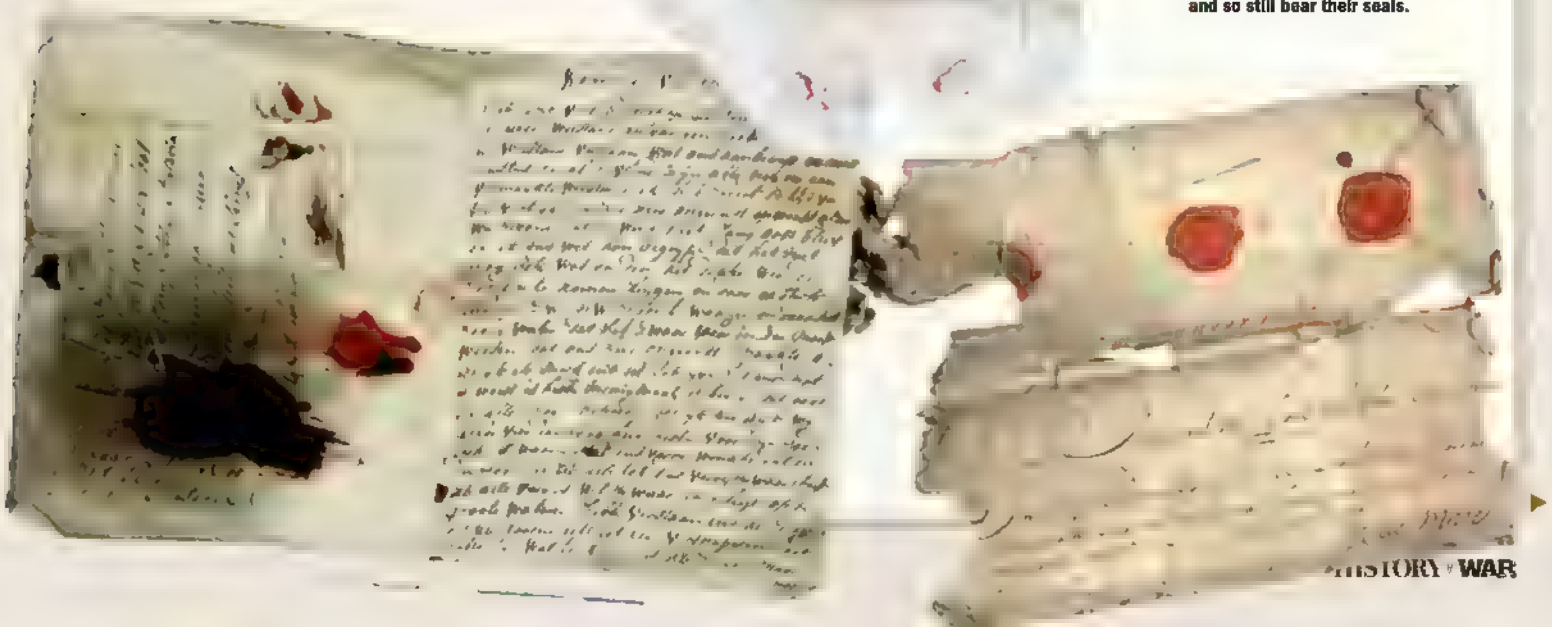
the British Navy. All documents on board, including his notebook, were seized and, in time, wound up in the National Archives. Two hundred years after their capture, the seeds were sent to Kew Gardens, where three of the 32 species were germinated successfully. The 200-year-old flora comprise a type of Acacia, a yellow-flowered shrub called Liparia Villosa and a stunning, pin-cushion-like flower called Leucospermum

What of those letters that haven't been opened, though? Their 200-year-old seals are still firmly in place. Some seem to be brief notes, others are very thick. What might they contain? The National Archives is full of such secrets. ▶

GARDEN VARIETY
Jan Teerlink's captured notebook contains neatly labelled little packets of the seeds he had collected at the Cape of Good Hope, where his ship stopped off on the way back from a trading voyage to the Dutch East Indies and China.



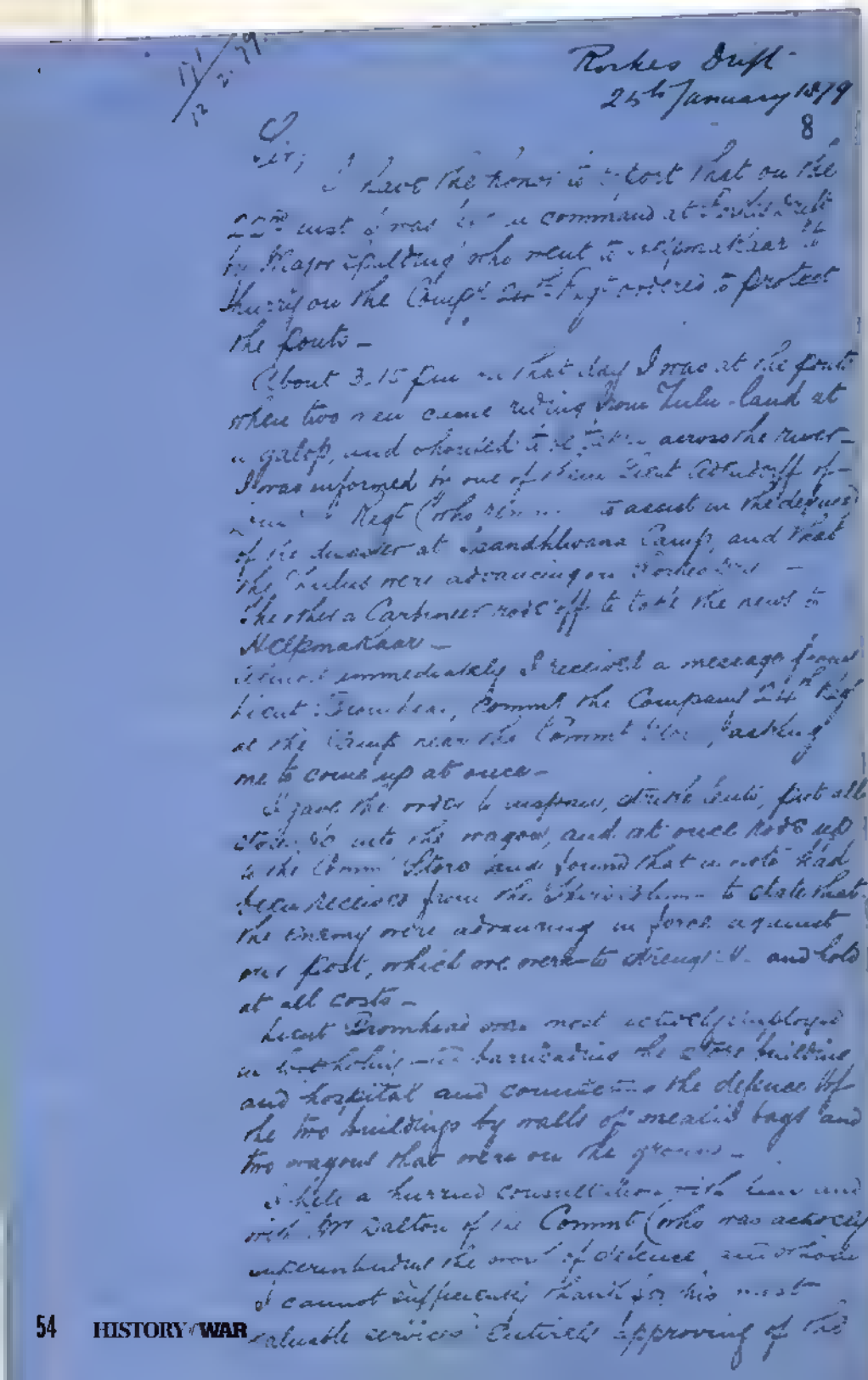
VOICES OF THE PAST
The captured letters are to addresses, many of which still exist. They are the ordinary stuff of life – business letters, news, complaints, family correspondence. Many have never been opened and so still bear their seals.



Rorke's DRIFT: *Report of* BATTLE

A first-hand re-telling of one of the most famous battles of all time...

This account of the defence of Rorke's Drift was written at the site just two days after the battle. Hundreds of dead Zulus lay round about. Wounded survivors were still being found and shot. The account was written well before anyone noticed that the story could be a useful distraction from the fact that, a few days previously, the British Army had undertaken an illegal invasion and suffered a humiliating defeat; and long before anyone would feel uncomfortable with the idea of Europeans armed with guns fighting Africans armed with spears. But it is hard to resist the excitement of the tale, in which barely 100 British soldiers fought off an army of almost 4,000 Zulus, from behind defences made of grain sacks and biscuit boxes.



Rorke's Drift
25th January 1879

Sir,

I have the honour to report that on the 22nd inst. I was in command at Fort Bute in Major Spalding's absence at Utrecht. Shortly after the Camp[n] 2nd Fus[r] arrived to protect the Fords –

About 3.15 pm on that day I was at the Fords when two men came riding from Zulu-land at a gallop, and shouted to me from across the river – I was informed by one of them (Lieut Adendorff of the [illegible] Regt (who remained in the defence of the drift at Sandhlwana Camp) and that the Zulus were advancing on Rorke's Drift – The other a Carbineer rode off to tell the news to Helpmakaar –

Upon receiving immediately I received a message from Lieut: Bromhead, Comm[g] the Company 2nd Fus[r] at the Camp near the Commissariat Store, asking me to come up at once –

I gave the order to inspan, & the Cattle, first all stock &c into the waggon, and at once rode up to the Comm[t] Store and found that a note had been received from the Border Horse – to state that the enemy were advancing in force against our post, which we were to defend and hold at all costs –

Lieut Bromhead was most actively employed in fortifying the Commissariat Store building and hospital and connecting the defence of the two buildings by walls of mealie bags and two waggons that were on the ground –

I held a hurried consultation with Lieut and with the Master of the Comm[t] (who was actively superintending the work of defence) and found I cannot sufficiently thank him for his most valuable services & entirely approving of the

In 1878, the southern tip of Africa was ruled by the British. To the east, on the other side of the Buffalo River, lay Zululand. The British High Commissioner to South Africa, Sir Bartle Frere, believed that Zululand should be absorbed into British territories. The British Government refused to countenance a war with the Zulu, and so Frere decided to force the issue. On the basis of some trumped-up grievances and demands, he ordered a British invasion force to cross the Buffalo River.

Rorke's Drift was a mission station that lay half a mile into Zululand. As the army surged by, its small house was converted into a hospital, and its church into an ammunition store, and, together with the newly built ponts across the Buffalo River, it was left in the care of 31 year-old Lieutenant John Chard of the Royal Engineers – the man who would later write this report – with a token force of 100 men. Chard had a reputation as a plodder – not that it mattered. As his commanding officer said before leaving Rorke's Drift, "I see you are senior, so you will be in charge – although, of course, nothing will happen."

The British invasion force of 5,000 had camped about six miles into Zululand, below

It's hard to resist the excitement of the tale, in which barely 100 British soldiers fought off almost 4,000 Zulus

a long, rocky outcrop, Isandlwana. Reports had come in that the Zulu army was advancing from the east, and so the commanding officer sent an advance force to meet it, leaving behind 1,700 men. But the reports were wrong. The Zulu army was encamped nearby, in a hidden valley. Around 10am, parties of Zulu were spotted on the heights, looking down at the British camp. Suddenly, streams of fast-running Zulu warriors descended to right and left. The British troops barely had time to organise a defensive line before the Zulu slammed into it. Within half an hour, the camp was encircled, its defences breached. Within another half an hour, it was completely destroyed, its defenders massacred.

Life at Rorke's Drift had been comfortable since the invasion force had left. 35 patients in the hospital had ailments ranging from fever to blisters, and the rest of the small force pottered about or wrote letters home.

At around 3.30pm, Chard was resting beside the ponts, when two survivors of

FROM THE FRONTLINE

The first page of the report of Lieutenant Chard, written at the site just two days after the British forces' heroic defence of Rorke's Drift.

THE BATTLEGROUND

Chard's drawing of Rorke's Drift – hospital to the right, store to the left. The red lines are the walls made of biscuit boxes and mealie bags.

Isandlwana came tearing towards the river on horseback, shouting that the Zulu were coming. Back at Rorke's Drift, news of the disaster had already reached the men. With no chance of outrunning the Zulu, they had set about building defensive walls with the only materials to hand: biscuit boxes and mealie (maize) bags. The four-foot-high defensive lines ran from the corners of the hospital to the ammunition store, with an inner retrenchment just in front of the store. Chard's report takes up the story:

"We had not completed a wall two boxes high when, at about 4.30pm, 500 or 600 of the enemy came in sight around the hill to our south, and advanced at a run against our south wall. They were met by a well-sustained fire but, notwithstanding their heavy loss, continued the advance to within 50 yards of the wall, when they met with such heavy fire from the wall, and cross-fire from the store, that they were checked, but taking advantage of the cover afforded by the cook-house, ovens, etc, kept up a heavy fire. The greater number, however, without stopping, moved to the left around the hospital and made a rush of our north-west wall of mealie bags, but after a short but desperate struggle were driven back with heavy loss into the bush around the works.

"Taking advantage of the bush, which we had not time to cut down, the enemy were able to advance under cover, close to our wall, and in this part soon held one side of the wall, while we held the other. A series of desperate assaults were made, extending from the hospital along the wall as the bush reached, but each was most splendidly met and repulsed by our men, with the bayonet... All this time, the enemy had been attempting to force the hospital, and shortly after set fire to its roof.

"The garrison at the hospital defended it room by room, bringing out all the sick who could be moved before they retired... As darkness came on, we were completely surrounded and after several attempts had been gallantly repulsed, were eventually forced to retire to the middle and then inner wall of the Kraal on our east. The position we then had we retained throughout. A desultory fire was kept up all night, and several assaults were attempted and repulsed, the vigour of the attack continuing until after midnight; our men, firing with the greatest coolness, did not waste a single shot, the light afforded by the burning hospital being of great help to us."

The cool, well-ordered report spares some of the terrifying drama – the desperate hand-to-hand fighting, when the biscuit-box wall was all that separated waves of Zulu warriors from British soldiers; the men in the hospital having to hack holes in the internal walls to escape as the Zulu overwhelmed them room by room; the guns so hot with firing that the men had to rip the arms off their uniforms to make protective gloves just to hold them; the Zulu framed in the firelight of the burning hospital; the men finally trapped in their last, tiny retrenchment as the Zulu attacked and attacked again.

The courage of the British defenders was extraordinary; so, too, was the courage of the Zulu warriors, who hurled themselves into the attack in spite of seeing their companions repeatedly cut down. But the Zulu were already exhausted from Isandlwana, had not eaten for two days and were desperately thirsty. At about 4am, as the light from the burning hospital died away, they retreated into the darkness. As dawn broke, Chard and his men realised that they had survived. Later that morning, they were finally relieved.

Seventeen British troops died in the defence; 351 Zulu are recorded as having been buried, although the real number of Zulu dead could be as high as 600. Chard's report was despatched to England, where it was reproduced by an enthusiastic press. Chard was fêted as a hero, invited to meet Queen Victoria, and received rapid promotion. Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded to the defenders, the highest for any regiment in a single engagement. The illegal invasion of Zululand and the disaster at Isandlwana could not be covered up or explained away, but Lieutenant Chard's report provided a potent distraction. ▶

JUST THE FACTS

The report is calm, accurate, well-ordered. Chard himself had a reputation as a plodder, and it's likely that he had more senior help with it.

The FIRST DAY *of* THE SOMME

Read the detailed military timeline of the how the disaster escalated...

These are documents from the darkest day in the history of the British Army: a plan for, and minute-by-minute reports of, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The reports show an unfolding tragedy. They also show why that first day went so horribly wrong.

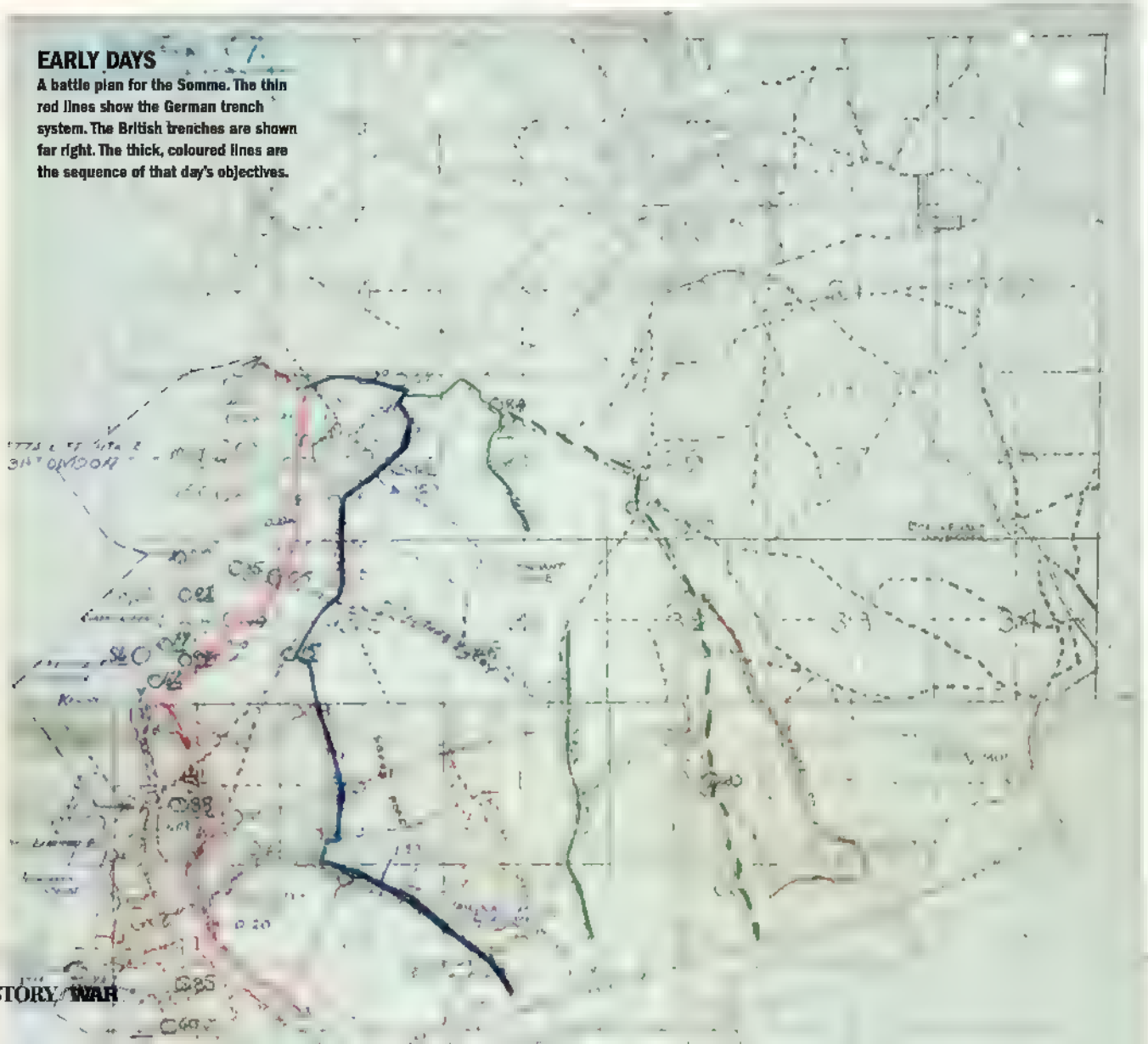
The First World War started for Britain in the summer of 1914, and was meant to be over by that Christmas. Instead, there was stalemate, and a line of trenches that stretched continuously from the Belgian coast across northern France to Switzerland. The British trench zone was close to the English Channel, running almost due north to south, from the town of Ypres to the River Somme. The deadlock in the trenches continued through the whole of 1915, and as winter drew in, the Allies – France, Britain, Russia and Italy – began forming battle plans for 1916. They agreed on a co-ordinated attack, the British part of which would take place along a 15-mile stretch of trenches that ran northwards from the Somme.

The map shown below is the battle plan for the British VIII Corps, which was responsible for a three-and-a-half-mile section of that frontline. The British trenches are off to the far left of the plan, running north to south (top to bottom). The German trench system, shown as thin red lines, stands opposite the British trenches. VIII Corps was made up of three main divisions: 31st, 4th and 29th. 31st, which was composed almost entirely of volunteers from Yorkshire and Lancashire, had the northernmost section of the attack, opposite the village of Serre. To the south of them was 4th Division. 4th Division included some of the most experienced soldiers in the British Army, regular soldiers from the campaigns of 1914 and 1915. Below them, opposite the village of Beaumont-Hamel, stood 29th Division, which was made up of Englishmen, Scots, Irish and an enthusiastic battalion of Newfoundlanders, who'd sailed from Canada the previous year.

The reports show an unfolding tragedy, and why that first day went so horribly wrong

The thick red line (marked 0.20) was VIII Corps' first planned objective of the day, and included taking Beaumont-Hamel. The thick blue line (marked 1.20) was the next objective, including the village of Serre and a German rear trench known as the Munich Trench. The thick green and brown lines were later objectives.

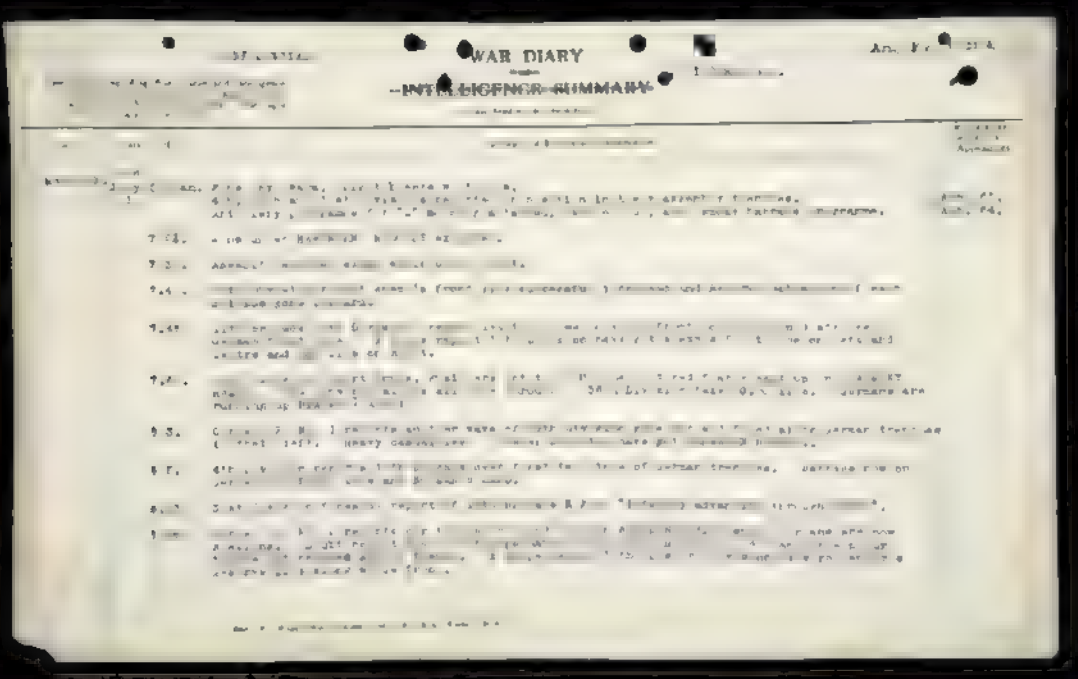
The British strategy was simple. For five days, its artillery would pound the German frontlines, destroying their trenches, dugouts and barbed wire. The Army would then walk, in a steady and orderly manner, across no-man's land to occupy the lifeless, shattered ▶



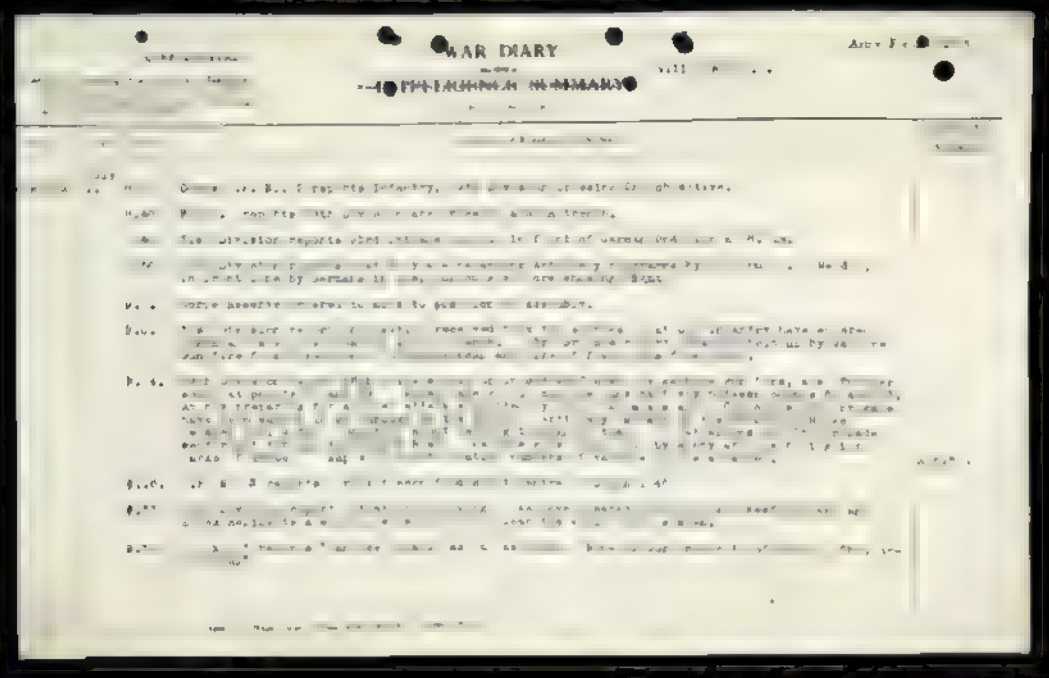
EARLY DAYS
A battle plan for the Somme. The thin red lines show the German trench system. The British trenches are shown far right. The thick, coloured lines are the sequence of that day's objectives.

REMEMBRANCE DAY POPPY

The famous symbol dates from the period between the two World Wars.


WAR DIARY

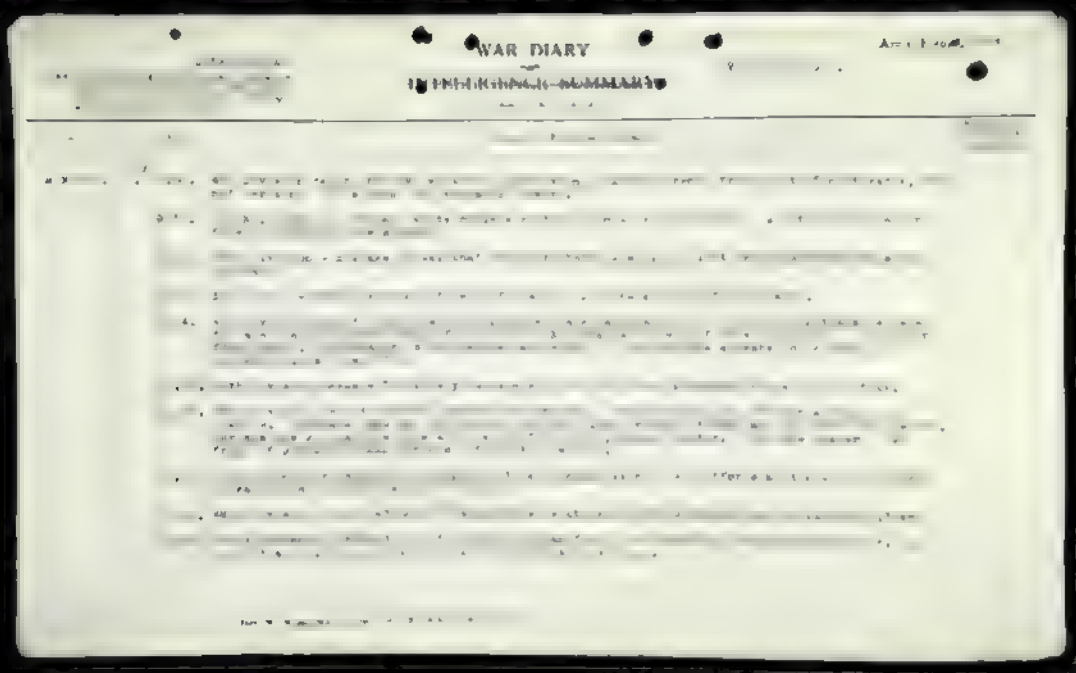
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY


WAR DIARY

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

AND SO IT BEGINS

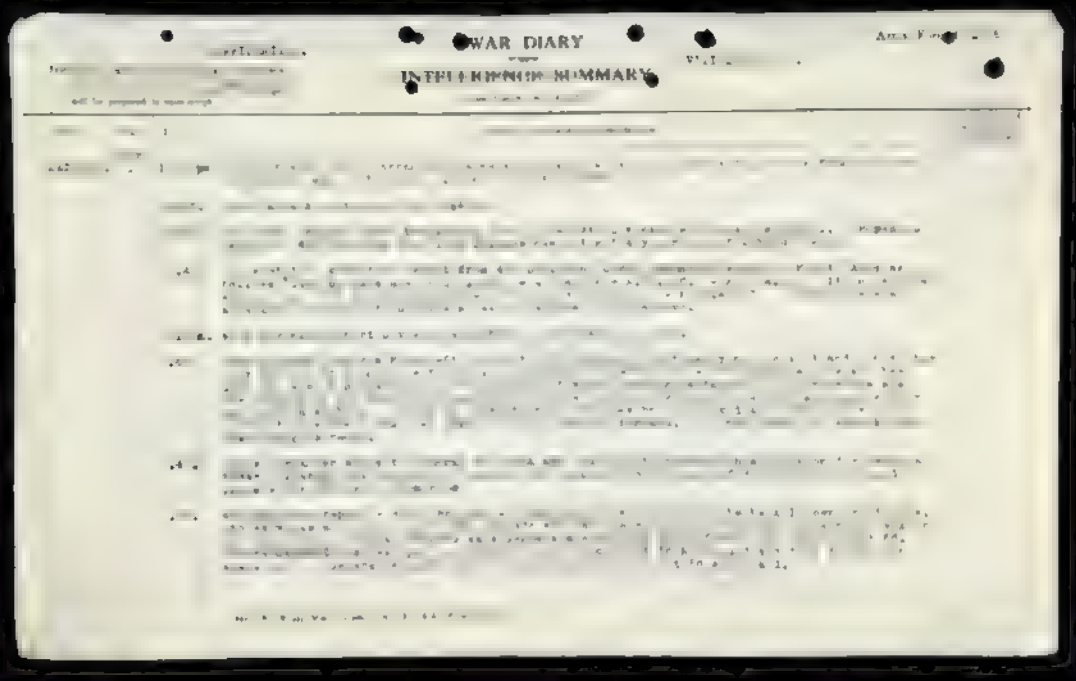
The early battlefield reports record success after success. The British have taken the towns, they have reached their objectives, the Germans are running away. But none of this was real. From around midday, the reports start to record an unfolding disaster.


WAR DIARY

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

FALSE TRAIL

As the day wore on, the reports began to finally reflect what was happening on the ground, and, far from achieving the objectives laid out in the battle plans, the troops were actually being brought down by the German guns.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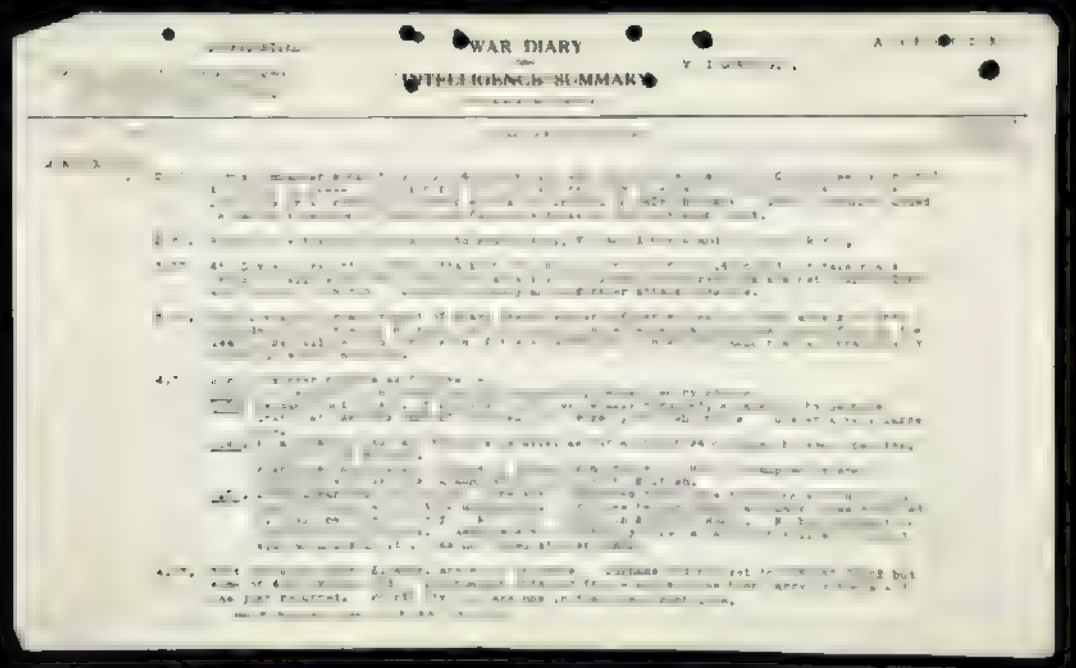
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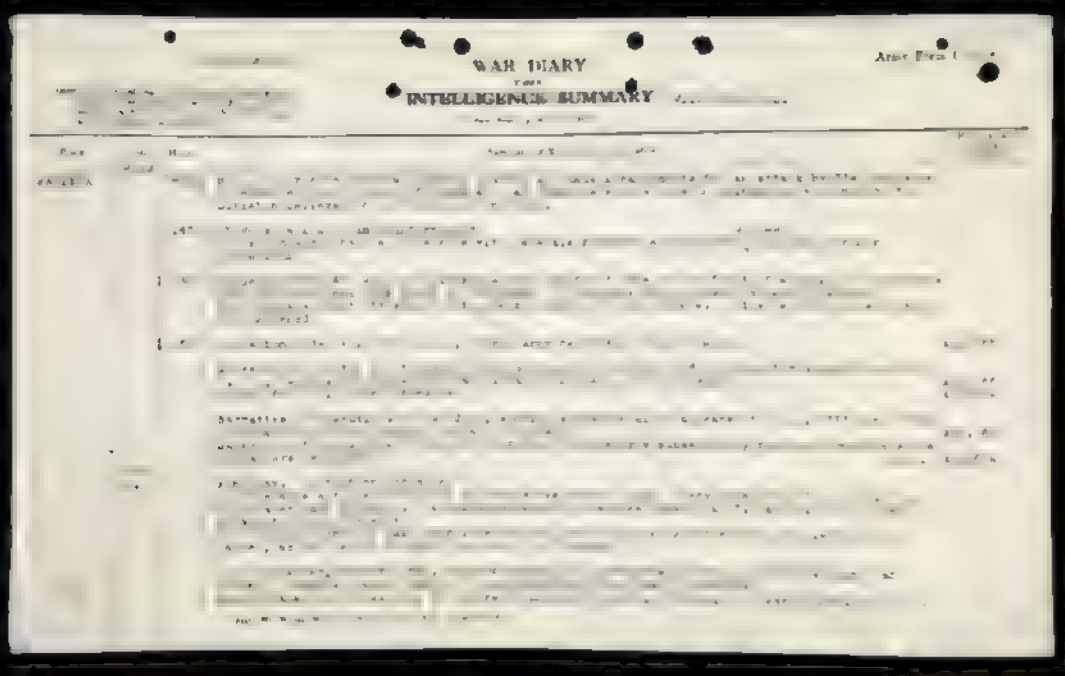
WAR DIARY
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

German positions, after which they would push further eastwards.

As the British troops advanced, artillery would fire over their heads, the bombardment smashing German defences ahead of the advancing infantry line. On paper, it looks very plausible.

VIII Corps' reports of the day itself open with dawn, which appeared warm and fine over the packed British trenches. The first recorded action is at 7.21am. Miners had tunnelled under the Hawthorn Redoubt, which stood just in front of Beaumont Hamel, and had laid a massive charge.

When it was detonated, a column of earth rose high into the air. Shock waves from the explosion knocked the men in the trenches off their feet, and created a wide crater. But by the time British troops reached the crater, they found that German soldiers had got there first.

The German frontline troops were not all dead, and their defences had not been shattered. But British High Command had been so fixated on its plan that it had failed to see the reality. This had been apparent to some men on the ground before the battle had started. A Brigade Major in 31st Division records that, the day before the battle, the Corps Commander "was extremely optimistic, telling everyone that the wire had been blown away, although we could see it standing strong and well".

These reports show vividly how, during the morning of the battle, British High Command continued to see the world in terms of its plan. VIII Corps' General Staff record success after success. Within minutes of the start of the battle, the German frontline is successfully crossed; Beaumont Hamel is taken, its German defenders running away down Beaumont Alley; the infantry advances through Serre; troops reach the Munich Trench by 8.40am, ahead of schedule.

None of this was real. Along this stretch of the battlefield, the German wire had not been blown away, and no one could walk through it. Beaumont Hamel and Serre had been bombed to rubble, but far from emptying the villages of German troops, it had simply made them perfect cover for German machine guns. The Germans had been warned about the start of the attack, and were ready for it. As these reports came in, the steadily walking men from VIII Corps were being mown down by German bullets, and blasted to pieces by German artillery.

86th Brigade is recorded as having "practically no one left"

There is a terrible note here, which unknowingly records an approaching massacre. Two hours after the start of the attack, hardly a man had crossed the German wire in front of Beaumont Hamel, and the incredulous commanders ordered two more brigades to attack. At 9.33am, the reports record: "29th Divis on reports situation improving. We have cleared point 89, and Newfoundland and Essex Regiments are going straight on to clear the whole front system."

Ordered to get forward quickly, the Newfoundlanders rose from their reserve trench to walk the 300 yards to the British frontline. German machine guns opened fire at once. As the Newfoundlanders were funnelled through gaps in the British wire, the killing intensified. In just 40 minutes, 684 Newfoundlanders were killed or wounded, out of 752 who had risen up from the reserve trench. Only a few dozen even made it beyond the British wire; none reached the German frontline.

Reality begins to break into the reports from around midday. Attacks are abandoned; the 11th Brigade is reported as having not, in fact, got to any portion of the Munich Trench; the 86th Brigade is recorded as having "practically no one left".

By the end of the day, VIII Corps had abandoned the attack. It had not gained an inch of ground. In the process, it had lost, on that one day, 13,636 men and 662 officers. Along the whole of the British front, some 60,000 men had been killed or wounded, half of them in the first hour. What you are seeing in these documents is not only the disaster as it happened, but also why it happened: because of the blindness of the British High Command.

AFTERMATH
When the battle ended, British High Command produced this map. The blue line to the left shows the final position of the British troops.

WEAPONS *changed* HISTORY

In the second part of our series, we examine a devastating WWI field-artillery piece, a vicious Viking blade and a ship that revolutionised naval warfare

THE SOUND OF THUNDER AT THE START OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, THE FRENCH ARMY HAD AROUND 4,000 75MM M1897S IN SERVICE.

The French 75MM M1897

The 19th Century saw the widespread introduction of breech-loading and rifled barrels, which together extended the range and accuracy of artillery considerably, and made possible the eventual application of indirect fire. Breech-loaders gradually brought more power, and with more powerful guns came the need for improved systems of recoil control, particularly if a gun crew was to avoid resighting after every shot. The 19th Century saw triumphs in this field also. Other advances in artillery included the development of sighting devices that enabled the crew to calculate the necessary angles to deliver indirect fire.

"[The French fire] was monstrous... Everything was covered in columns of black smoke, so high and broad that I could hardly see anything; in between were white shrapnel bursts. Limbers and riderless horses emerged from time to time fleeing Montceaux."

– German artilleryman, First Battle of the Marne, 1914.

The French 75mm M1897 is a perfect example of how all these elements came together in one weapon. An advanced hydropneumatic recoil system maintained the gun's precise position after each shot – its trail and wheels didn't even move during firing. (Powerful smoothbore guns with no recoil system, by contrast, could roll back three feet on firing.) Combined with a rapid-action rotating-screw breech-loading system, it could put 15 shells on target every minute, in the hands of a well-trained crew; the recoil cycle only took about two seconds. (The ammunition was also of the fixed type, which aided fast reloading.) High-explosive, anti-tank or shrapnel shells could be delivered out to ranges of around 7,500 yards, although with later boat-tailed ammunition, the range of some shell types extended to some 12,000 yards.

The gun served with distinction in WWI, blowing apart German attacks at the First Battle of the Marne

The M1897 was one of the best field guns available for the next 20 years, and was also used extensively by Polish, British and US forces. It served with distinction during the First World War, blowing apart German attacks at the First Battle of the Marne in 1914, and firing a total of 16 million shells during the Battle of Verdun in 1916. Its destructive power against emplacements and barbed-wire defences was limited by its light shells, but its rapidity of fire made it devastating against infantry assaults. The gun also, intelligently, featured a shield for its crew, to protect them from small-arms fire.

M1897s even soldiered on into the next World War, and the gun didn't entirely disappear from the world's battlefields until the end of that conflict in 1945. The machine was a triumph of engineering, including innovations of its own while incorporating the best of the 19th Century's developments in artillery.

The Dane AXE

On the Bayeux Tapestry – which depicts the Norman conquest of Britain in 1066 – one weapon stands out with unnerving power. A scene depicts a housecarl of King Harold's army smashing a broad-headed axe into the skull of a Norman horse. The weapon was the Dane axe, and for centuries it was one of the most devastating hand-held weapons available.

As its name denotes, the Dane axe was a Viking brand of battle-axe, first developed during the 9th Century. It was exclusively a two-handed weapon, the grip being a necessity as a weapon with a haft measuring up to five-feet long. Its iron or steel blade flared out broadly at both the top and the bottom, producing a cutting edge that could measure up to 18 inches. The edge slanted downwards and backwards to maximise the slicing effect of the blow, probably reflecting an ancestry in animal-slaughtering tools. The bit of the blade was usually made from a steel with a higher carbon content than other parts of the head, forming a more durable, harder edge.

The lethality of the Dane axe is unquestionable. When swung with force, it was easily capable of shattering open an opponent's helmet, splitting his mail links, or even removing a head or a limb. It was probably swung either straight down in a cleaving blow against the opponent's skull, or at a 45-degree angle, aiming to hack into the neck, shoulders and upper arms. Nor are the Bayeux Tapestry's depictions of horse-killing unfounded.

When swung with force, it was capable of shattering open a helmet, or removing a head or a limb

In fact, this may have been one of the Dane axe's most useful applications.

The Dane axe was certainly effective in action, and over the centuries it was widely adopted beyond Scandinavian shores. It appears to have remained in use as late as the 14th Century in mainland Europe and England, but endured for a further two centuries in some parts of Ireland and Scotland.

Several factors influenced its eventual disappearance. First, improvements in sword design meant that an axe-wielding soldier was unable to match the subtle movements of a swordsman. Second, pole-arms such as the poleaxe and halberd became more practical options for arming mass soldiery, being able to deliver a more versatile range of offensive and defensive techniques on the battlefield. Yet for the duration of its useful life, the Dane axe was, in terms of sheer power, the ultimate edged weapon, and its effect on the enemy must have been as much psychological as physical.

FIT FOR A KING KING STEPHEN OF ENGLAND WAS SAID TO HAVE USED A DANE AXE AT THE BATTLE OF LINCOLN IN 1141, PRIOR TO HIS CAPTURE AND IMPRISONMENT.

The DREADNOUGHT

By the late 19th Century, battleship design had largely settled on mixed-armament configurations, each ship displaying a variety of calibers, from a few heavy, long-range guns to short-range, quick-firing weapons. The theory was that by being thus armed, a ship could deal with threats across the full range spectrum, from long-distance shots at enemy capital ships, right down to close-in engagements with torpedo boats. As combat situations revealed, however, having multiple calibers simply complicated effective fire-control.

A new idea eventually began to take shape – that of a battleship armed purely (apart from minor defensive armament) with big guns of uniform caliber. The Japanese Navy began laying down such a battleship in 1905, but it was the British who would unveil the first completed example. The vessel, named HMS Dreadnought, had a displacement of 18,120 long tons, armour plate up to 12 inches thick, a top speed of 21 knots and, most importantly, ten 12-inch guns arranged in two-gun turrets. Here was a warship the likes of which the world had never seen, and with the launch of HMS Dreadnought on 10 February 1906, almost all other battleship types were rendered obsolete overnight.

The result, fuelled by various imperial tensions, was a huge and costly arms race – by 1910, Britain alone had built 48 dreadnought-type battleships, and Germany 26. "Dreadnought" became a British blanket term for all big warships, which over the next three decades grew faster, larger and more heavily armoured,

Here was a warship the likes of which had never been seen. Almost all others were rendered obsolete

and boasted bigger guns. There were variants on the theme, such as the "battlecruiser," still armed with heavy guns but with a reduced armour component in order to increase speed. One of the most famous battlecruisers was HMS Hood, which displaced 46,680 long tons, carried eight 15-inch guns and ran at a maximum speed of 31 knots. Its lack of deck armour, however, would prove its undoing – the ship was blown apart on 27 May 1941, when a shell from the German pocket battleship Bismarck detonated its magazine, killing all but three of its crew.

The fate of the Hood illustrates one of the great, sad truths of the age of the battleship. These majestic, highly visible emblems of imperial power became little more than vulnerable burdens to the state. Engagements between major capital ships during the First World War were relatively few, the greatest example being Jutland in May 1916, as battleships were so costly that all sides were wary of committing them to risky battles.

Over time, submarines and aircraft also proved themselves to be confident battleship-killers, particularly during the Second World War. As a result, following the loss of the Bismarck, the German Navy retained its major warships in safe home waters for the rest of the conflict, most of them bombed into destruction by the RAF. By the end of the Second World War, battleships were most useful as floating anti-aircraft batteries to protect aircraft carriers, or for providing shore bombardment. Big guns, it appeared, were no longer decisive in a world of torpedoes and bombs.

SUB-SINKER DESPITE SEEING LITTLE SERVICE IN WWI, HMS DREADNOUGHT BECAME THE ONLY BATTLESHIP EVER TO SINK A SUBMARINE, DOWNING THE SM U-29 IN 1915

This feature is an edited extract from *A History Of The World In 100 Weapons* by Chris McNab, available from Osprey Publishing: www.ospreypublishing.com

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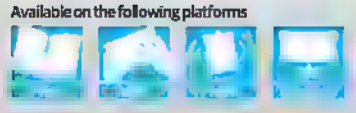

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Charles Cundall's painting *The Evacuation Of Dunkirk* [illegible] an idea of the [illegible] of the operation

'Blood All Over Your Hands'

Second World War: In the summer of 1940, in an operation that was almost the reverse of D-Day, nearly 350,000 Allied troops were evacuated from Dunkirk, France, as the German forces closed in. Here, *History Of War* hears accounts from some of the survivors...

BACKSTORY

In May 1940, the Allied forces in northern France were cut off as German troops swept in through the Ardennes in southern Belgium. After launching an attack from Arras that failed to halt the German advance, commander-in-chief Lord Gort decided that the best course of action was to preserve troops for the defence of Britain, and to evacuate from the port of Dunkirk...

TO THE TWITTER GENERATION, the idea of keeping a secret is an almost outlandish proposition. For instance, the story of the code-breaking efforts at Bletchley Park still inspires awe – not just for the cracking of Enigma, but for the way that so many thousands of people kept this gravest of secrets. Similarly, the evacuation of nearly half a million men from a small French port somehow also had to be kept quiet. Obviously, the troops gathering there were seen by countless German bombers overhead. The aim of all these men, too, would have been fairly clear. Yet nothing could be said out loud.

In Britain, as the destroyers and the paddle steamers and the tugs and the skoots and the bijou cabin cruisers received their orders and prepared for their careful voyage, the public had no real idea of what was happening. Strikingly, life – though dislocated – carried on, under a balmy spring sky. In cricket, "London Counties entertained 2,000 spectators to enjoyable cricket at Cheam, and defeated the home club with the loss of four batsmen." Elsewhere, North London's tennis courts echoed with the thwack of serves. "A lovely morning," wrote one female diarist. "Played tennis with Frank from 7am to breakfast."

Nor was the crisis in northern France affecting the capital's cultural life – though, again, underneath all the reporting seemed to be an implicit admission of subterranean tension. "It takes more than the mere prospect of invasion to make the theatre inactive," gushed a London arts correspondent just on the borders of seemliness. "Not only do theatres continue to open, but they offer four first nights this week." In part, our collective wartime image of London is coloured by the Blitz; yet during May 1940, the bombing was still several months off. The city may have been in blackout, but its citizens – even those who feared invasion – would not give up their nightlife.

Amid these determined distractions, it was clear that people were speculating. How could they not? "Everybody has got the dithers," wrote one Surrey man. "Anyone would think Hitler was coming up the Thames in a rowing boat." It was on 26 May, as the evacuation began, that the not wholly sure-footed Ministry of Information felt obliged to step in, on the grounds of security. "Everyone in the country is waiting for news of our men in France," announced Minister Duff Cooper. "So is the enemy – and the giving of news at this moment might cost the lives of men... we must all wait patiently and confidently until the news can be given to us with safety."

It was on 26 May, as the evacuation began, that the Ministry of Information felt obliged to step in, on the grounds of security

Those British troops were now being tested in ways that, just months ago, they would never have imagined. From Dunkirk, and stretching several miles up that windy coast to La Panne across the Belgian border, a landscape that had been the realm of families and gentle promenades was now a mass of British, French and Belgian soldiers, as well as terrorised civilians.

A few veterans have observed that because of the sand, the detonation of the bombs from the Junkers was much less effective than on the open roads; that the shockwave was absorbed instead by the sand. Yet that is a calculatedly ▶

LIGHTENING THE LOAD

IN THE COURSE OF THE EVACUATION, THE BEF WAS FORCED TO LEAVE BEHIND A HUGE AMOUNT OF EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING 2,472 GUNS, 63,879 VEHICLES, 20,548 MOTORCYCLES, 76,097 TONS OF AMMUNITION, AND 416,940 TONS OF STORES. MUCH OF THIS WAS TAKEN UP AND USED BY THE GERMAN ARMY.

stiff-upper-lipped way of looking at it. Men were hit, or otherwise they were destroyed internally by the blasts, their organs scrambled. In either case, their bodies, sometimes in pieces, lay in those dunes. Some recalled seeing corpses repeatedly thrown into the air by successive blasts. After the planes had flown over, the lucky survivors looked up cautiously, and listened as the cries went up: "Medic! Medic!" Some recalled how men from the Royal Army Medical Corps stayed impassive as they dealt with a range of hideous wounds. There were makeshift casualty wards a little distance away, one set up in the reception area of a hotel; the medics did what they could with blood-soaked blankets and supplies of morphine.

Psychological Impact

One of the logistical horrors facing these men was how to convey the seriously wounded onto the boats; in some cases, there were improvised litters. The medics also knew that, while everyone else was waiting for their place on a boat, they would have to be among the last to leave, for they could not abandon the most seriously wounded soldiers in their care. This, they knew, meant probable capture, by an army that could not be trusted to uphold any of the ethical conventions usually attached to the Red Cross.

The German bombs aimed at the beaches also raised a question of psychological impact (even the sternest of medical reports, written up by doctors monitoring the Dover Patrol, were to acknowledge that fear and neurosis were not products of cowardice or bad character, but might sometimes be the direct result of such attacks). For the men on the beaches, even firing a rifle was only really misdirection; the truth was that they were helpless, and they felt it.

Yet, according to one account, some British soldiers remained remarkably insouciant about their position; a few took the opportunity to get drunk on good red wine. Indeed, as one veteran later confessed, "We got absolutely plastered!"

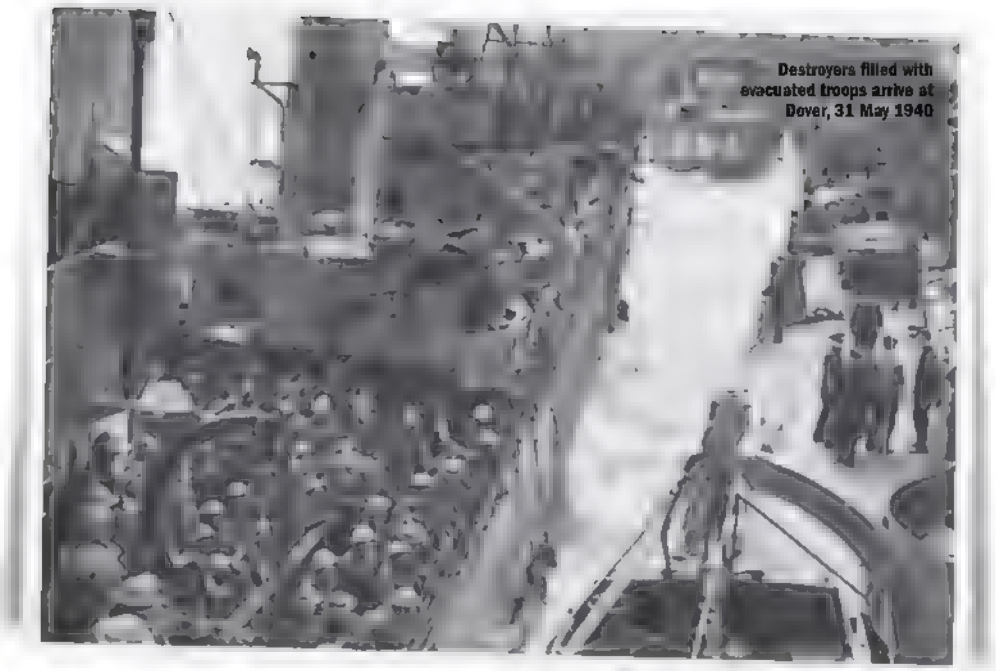
The Isle of Man steamer Mona's Isle had been the first to make the journey across. She and her crew set sail from Dover at 9pm. The crossing took around three hours, and she arrived at Dunkirk Gare Maritime just after midnight. There were troops gathered at the wood-and-concrete jetty known as "The Mole". Embarkation began under cover of the small hours. Possibly no one could have calculated just how many men this boat – or any of the others – could hold in one go. On this first round of the evacuation, Mona's Isle accommodated 1,429 men.

Just before the sun glimmered into the sky, the steamer set off again. But its voyage back was painfully slow. Despite the best efforts of all those minesweepers, the English Channel was still seething with lethal traps. On top of that was the topographical jeopardy posed by the Goodwin Sands. Any boat stranded here would have been torn apart in minutes by bombers. Mona's Isle was on Route Z, the first devised; it meant that on the return journey, for the first 20 miles or so, she had to sail troublingly close to the French coast before being able to make the turn at Calais towards England. Those few miles made her – and following vessels – acutely vulnerable to German fire. Mona's Isle first took hits from German artillery. Then, while sailing towards Dover, she was machine-gunned by German fighters. Her petty officer took four bullets through his arm but still managed to fire back.

After this baptismal voyage, Mona's Isle arrived back in Dover around midday on 27 May, the other vessels not long after. Two things would now have been crystal-clear to [the man responsible for the evacuation] Admiral Bertram Ramsay and those around him: the evacuation could no longer be regarded as a secret from the Germans; and that initial voyage had taken a long time – 15 hours to evacuate 1,429 men. There were 240 times that number still awaiting deliverance. How long did they have before they were overwhelmed by German forces?

On that day, one of Ramsay's best lieutenants, Captain W. G. Tennant, sailed out on the naval destroyer Wolfhound. He was going to France to bring an element of logic and organisation to the operation. He took with him 12 officers and 150 men. By now, the German planes were attending to the cross-Channel routes. Nothing could evade the persistent fury of the Luftwaffe. Some time afterwards, Captain Tennant recalled that harrowing voyage – the necessity for long detours to try and avoid the worst of the plane attacks. Then there was the lead weight of apprehension when at last the burning harbour came into view. Captain Tennant made land and took stock of the ruins around him. The scale of the job was made horribly apparent. "The sight of Dunkirk and nearby districts gave one a hollow feeling in the pit of the stomach," he said. "The Boche had been going for it hard, and there was not a pane of glass left anywhere – most of it was lying around in the streets. There were also dead lying about from the last air raid."

He added, with an inflammatory note, "As regards the bearing and behaviour of the troops, both British and French, prior to and during the embarkation, it must be recorded that the earlier parties were embarked off the beaches in a condition of disorganisation."



Destroyers filled with evacuated troops arrive at Dover, 31 May 1940

Men were hit, or destroyed internally by the blasts, their organs scrambled; in either case, their bodies, often in pieces, lay in those dunes

Highland steel

The popular perception of Dunkirk is of thousands of encircled, dehydrated and poorly equipped Allied soldiers massing on the beach, waiting desperately for boats to take them back to England – but that takes something away from those courageous men who fought to the bitter end to bide time for their comrades. As the Germans closed in, brave rearguard actions were fought, notably by the 51st Highland Division, which, as the German assault went on, took up a line just south of the River Somme. Even as the general order to retreat to Dunkirk spread, these soldiers did their best to prevent the Germans from swallowing the Allies whole. Within two weeks of the Dunkirk evacuation, more than 10,000 members of the 51st were taken prisoner at St Valery, and in 2010 veterans of the division congregated there to commemorate the 70th anniversary of their fallen colleagues' heroic actions.

Many years later, any suggestion that there had been "disorganisation" on those beaches was met with rage from within the military establishment and the War Office. Senior Generals recalled, instead, calm and dignity in what were admittedly extremely undignified circumstances. Yet Captain Tennant was by no means a one in having perceived a state of near anarchy

Even before the official Operation Dynamo evacuation had begun, some naval recruits found themselves signed up for a special operation that would require both nerve and authority. These carefully chosen young men were being sent over to France not merely to help bring soldiers back but – eventually – to bring a semblance of control on the beaches. This would mean keeping the peace among thousands of men under German attack, while trying to ensure that the evacuation was carried out as smoothly as possible

Secret mission

One such candidate was 23-year-old Vic Viner, whose eyes had been opened to the wider world by his few years in the Royal Navy. He had no idea what he had been selected to do; simply that he'd been recalled from the Mediterranean. "There were these special courses at Portsmouth," he explained. "I finished mine and we were sent back to Chatham [the naval docks on the Kent coast]. I was told to dump my gear, and to go and have something to eat. Then, from 6pm, we were to assemble in the gym, where we were told that we were going to do a special project. Then we went back to the gym. There were trestle tables. We were told: 'You will go and pick up a revolver from the table. Sixty rounds of ammunition. And a little pouch – which has 60 bars of chocolate in it.' And when we'd got that, we were to assemble over in the corner and await further instructions

"Then we were told – I think just after midnight – to go out onto the parade ground. There was a fleet of company buses. We were told to board the buses, and then they told us, 'You're going to Dover, and on the way down you will be told why you are going.' That's when we were told we were going to assist with the evacuation of the BEF

"So we arrived at Dover," Viner continues, "and there were four destroyers, E-class. I was told to go on HMS Esk with 12 other fellas. We set sail. As we were going over, the Captain of the ship came round to us and said, 'What you've got to do is take away my ship's whaler, and go to the beaches and bring back soldiers. I've no idea until I get there where I'm going to drop anchor or what I'm going to do. So just stand by.'

"I think we arrived just after 4am – daylight. And as the destroyer was coming in, we saw all these blobs in the water. We had no idea what they were. Of course, they were soldiers. Bodies."

This was the first intimation of what lay ahead for Viner and his mates. There were men on those beaches who had already succumbed to fear. A few imagined that it might be possible to swim to England. Others were suffering trauma, the after-effect of continuous bombing along the road to Dunkirk, added to the shortage of food and fresh water. They had plunged into the water with no rational sense of what they were going to do next. Theirs were the bloated corpses that Viner was so surprised to see on that May dawn.

"I took away the whaler and my colleague took the motorboat," he continued. "A whaler is a small craft with oars; the idea was that it could be used as a form of ferry to get men from the difficult to reach jetty and beaches, and take them out to the depths where the destroyers were anchored.

These men are in good spirits as they arrive at a London railway station, their rescue complete

"There were four of us in the boat, and we picked up 16 soldiers. They were fully equipped still. But you have to remember that this was early." When the evacuation reached full tilt, the men were ordered to discard everything that they had, the better to make room on the boats

That early morning, Viner began his back breaking work: "We rowed back to the Esk, put them there, had a quick rest, then rowed back again – we did four trips. And the surf was running. You had to get the boat into and out of it again. There was a lot of pushing going on. And a lot of soldiers with all their gear, so it was heavy."

Sweated blood

"Well, on the fourth trip back, we pulled up and John Robinson next to me said, 'Vic, you've got blood all over your hands,'" Viner continued "I looked down at them – and then at his hands – and said, 'So have you.'" Both men saw that the blood seemed to be pouring down their sleeves They sloughed off their uniform jackets and shirts, and looked on with astonishment. "We'd sweated blood," said Viner lightly. It was the effort of constantly rowing back and forth at high speed with such a heavy load in a running surf.

Viner went back aboard the destroyer and said to the Captain, "Look, sir. We can't do this any more," and the Captain replied, "I realise that." Then he said, "I've received a signal that an operation has commenced – Operation Dynamo."

This was the point at which any naval rating might have preferred to continue rowing and sweating blood. Recalled Viner, "The Captain said to us, 'A flotilla of small ships are coming across the Channel from Ramsgate and Dover. They're going inshore as far as they can, and the soldiers will be loaded onto the little boats. They will go back to the larger boats, and the larger boats will take them back to England. I'm discharging you now from here – you're to go to the beach and take what gear you've got with you, report to the first officer you can see and tell him you're part of the Royal Naval beach party that is 150-strong. A hundred and fifty of you altogether will be there.' And I stayed on there, on the beach, for six days."

Viner was soon to discover the nature of his extraordinary mission – he was to try and bring the temperature down among the troops, while somehow avoiding being bombed and strafed to ribbons himself

While this command was being absorbed, others were still making their way to the port. "I had a pocket full of sugar lumps," said Charles Searle. "But you get fed up with sucking those. On the way there, you just scrounged whatever you could. A lot of the cows were dead. No milk. Any cows that were still alive, they were all milked dry or slaughtered. The amazing thing was that all the French were going to Dunkirk as though they were being evacuated. It was their country being overrun, and they didn't even know where to go."

Indeed, among French military high command, there was a persistent sense of what might now be termed denial. On the morning of 27 May, with HQ having been moved unceremoniously from Arras to La Panne just a few miles upbeach of Dunkirk, there was a meeting in the dining room of the Hotel du Sauvage. Here, the British, among them General Adam (who was in charge of making sure Dunkirk's perimeter held) and Colonel Bridgeman (General Adam's Operations Officer, who had, some time back, made a ▶

survey of Dunkirk's defences), listened to the order that had been wired in from the French General Weygand. The plan, they were told, was to thrust forward and eject the Germans from Calais. The British regarded the idea as nonsensical: had the French high command not been watching what had been happening over the past two weeks? And the coolness of their response – that of many of the French Generals was not much warmer – made it plain that the one and only priority was evacuation. Talk of defence lines and recaptured territory was akin to science fiction. And even if the thousands of leaderless men now swarming onto the beaches were ready to launch such an attack, what would they do it with? Many had nothing but their Lee Enfield rifles. There were other guns, but much equipment had been discarded on the road back.

Adding to the disorientation, the men – and, to a large extent, their officers – had no access to communications equipment. There was virtually nothing in the way of radios, and certainly no telephones, except at the makeshift HQ at La Panne. Place yourself,

Troops wade out to board smaller boats that will carry them to larger vessels

for a moment, in the frayed boots of a soldier who has made his way to the town harbour, milling with countless others, looking towards the mole, that jetty jutting out some half a mile into the deeper waters, the view becoming obscured every now and then by the black smoke gushing from the town's bombed oil tanks. So many men, staring out to sea, wondering if, never mind when, the boats would materialise.

Not that all the soldiers were inert – far from it. Even without an arsenal of weapons, there were ideas for at least holding off the enemy. There was a notion of getting kites aloft; these would in some way make life more difficult for incoming German bombers. But even with a number of kites extemporised from Army kit and other material, the soldiers were thwarted by something beyond their control: the fine weather. In that breezeless air, kites – even if they had been of the slightest use – could not be launched

Back in Britain, local residents provide evacuees with refreshments

Macabre moments

For Vic Viner, patrolling his stretch of beach, there was an element of the surreal about the evacuation. He recalled the moment of dizzying realisation when he and his fellows – who had washed away the blood they had been sweating while rowing – disembarked onto the sands. They were handed revolvers. His lieutenant told him: "The signal's come from the Vice-Admiral at Dover: You're to get order out of chaos." They were to organise the soldiers into columns and make sure that those columns kept going. The

The lieutenant added, "You're probably wondering why you've got the revolver. Well, it's for anyone who tries to jump the queue"

lieutenant added: "You're probably wondering why you've got the revolver. Well, the revolver is for anyone who tries to jump the queue. Or if anyone causes any other kind of problem, you're to draw your revolver and shoot them."

In an already fissile situation, the idea that a young fellow with a revolver would not only have the power to open fire on his own side at will, but would also have to make the quicksilver decision to do so, based on an effort to get ahead in a queue, is illustrative of the greater crisis.

"I had to draw the revolver three times," remembered Viner. "But I never did fire because the fella was just ... It was an awesome responsibility. So there we were, on the beach. That's when the bombers came to dive-bomb it."

Another young naval operative sent to try and keep order was Victor Chanter, who recalled: "We commenced organising orderly queues, lines of soldiers for embarkation into small rowing boats and floats; lines that often dispersed quickly into the dunes behind the beach with the arrival of bombs and bursts of machine-gun fire from German aircraft strafing the sands."

By now, it had become abundantly clear that a queue almost half a mile in length along the concrete-and-wood mole was too slow a means of getting men on board ship. On top of this, the jetty was painfully vulnerable to German bombs; it had already taken a direct hit. "So they got some planks as best they could to patch it up," explained former sea cadet Reg Vine. There had to be another method of getting the men safely off to sea. And this is where the little ships found their finest purpose. "The bigger ships would lay out in the Channel, just off shore, and the little ships would take them. Some of the little ships – which were rather large – did the trips to Dover and came back again. Some went to Ramsgate. All those little ships – well," said Vic Viner with feeling, "there were very few that were manned by the owners of the ships. They were all manned by naval personnel. This is something we veterans get so cross about..." The idea that the boats were mostly manned by their owners, later a staple of popular depictions, is sometimes referred to as the Myth of Dunkirk. In fact, added Viner, "It was naval personnel doing the job.

"Back on the beach, I looked after three columns going out." That is, three columns of men, with 50 in each column. Along with the practical concerns of food and water, Viner found that there were macabre moments. As well as the corpses in the surf, "there were men in the water, just standing quite still, the water up to their neck". And so it was that he tried to settle

The Dunkirk survivors received a hero's welcome on their return home

Food for thought

The long march to Dunkirk without food or water took its toll on soldier Bob Halliday. Despite the danger that he and his friend would lose their places in the columns they had joined, they headed to La Panne to see what they could find. "I was out scavenging with my pal – exploring broken-down lorries, seeing if we could get some food," recalled Halliday. "Then there were three high-flying aircraft, heavy bombers, which we assumed were ours. The bomber dropped a stick of bombs, and it lifted us across the road."

There was a moment of blackness before Halliday was able to open his eyes: "I looked up and I could see... well, my friend was alright, too." He was perturbed by the persistent sense that his ear was not right, although he neglected to have a medical until years later. "We made our way back, a bit shaken," he smiled. "Didn't find any food, and made our way back to the beach, only to find that we were put to the back of the queue."

in, to find a point of stability. Over the course of the following few days, life on that beach would become progressively more harrowing.

For RAF signals operative Arthur Taylor, there was one other pressing element of jeopardy as he made his way into Dunkirk. It remained essential that no one discover that he was in the RAF. For, all around him, he could hear the chorus of bitterness about the failure of the RAF to take on the German bombers. There was a real sense, he recalled, that if his true status were known, he would have been beaten up, or worse. And so it was that even under that hot May sun, he resolutely held around him the long coat given to him by a sympathetic officer, and continued to tramp along in a pair of ill-fitting Wellington boots.

As soon as they reached the smoky town, they somehow found a café that would open its doors to them. "I said to the girl behind the bar, 'Can you fill my water bottle with water, please?'" continued Taylor. "She said, 'There's no water here – the Germans have blown up all the waterworks. But give me your bottle and I'll fill it with vin rouge.' So we all had red wine to take with us."

"And then," he added, "we got to the edge of the beach and there was an officer or beach master – it might even have been Vic Viner – and he was telling us where to go. You had the option of going left or going right once you got to the beach. Turn right, you went to La Panne, where all the sandbanks were. Turn left, and that would get you to the queue to the East Mole.

"The queue was miles long. It took me 36 hours to get from the back to the front. And it was dive-bombed and shelled all day long. When the bombers came diving in, you spread out from there right to the edge of the water, so the target was wider and you were less likely to get shot or killed or bombed. And afterwards, you would look behind to see where the shells had landed and who had been killed. If you got out of your place in the queue, you had to go to the back."

Structurally unsound

All the while, the destroyers, the paddle steamers and the long, flat-bottomed skoots were trying to load as many men on as possible. Jim Cockfield, with the 50th Northumbrian Division, had been among those who had just marched into Belgium when the Allies were forced into

German medical corps carry a wounded countryman to safety

retreat. A footsore journey of some days had seen him and his friends pitch up on the beaches at La Panne, but they did some exploring a little further afield and found themselves a rowing boat. Obviously, their intention was not to row right across the Channel (though there were instances when men made such declarations). They had seen, in the distance, a variety of boats. Their simple idea was to make for one of those. They pointed themselves in the direction of one of the larger ships, but it soon became apparent that their own craft was structurally unsound.

They swivelled a bit and came within view of a paddle steamer, the Gracie Fields. She had already performed sterling work; on a previous trip, she had picked up 281 men and delivered them to Dover. And as Jim Cockfield's rowing boat drew up, the crew helped them aboard. A grateful Cockfield went below deck to find the engine room, a handy place to dry out his sopping clothing. But later, there was a terrific explosion. The boat had been hit, and it was the engine room that had taken the bomb. Cockfield was unscathed, a few other men were not. The steamer was now sailing round and round in circles, its rudder damaged – this at a time when there were 750 other soldiers on board. Fortunately, there were two skoots in the vicinity and, as the larger boat circled, the men were taken off and thence across the Channel in the more basic craft.

One of the skoots came back for the Gracie Fields; there was a chance that she might be towed and repaired. But the going was slow; that night, under the moonlight waves, the paddle steamer began to fill with water. Captain Larkin – who had sailed her through peace and war – was taken off and the boat went down. But, thanks to J. B. Priestley, the Gracie Fields was later to acquire a form of immortality.

Another venerable pleasure craft, the Medway Queen, faced an unusual nocturnal hazard. On those warm spring nights, the sea glittered with phosphorescence. As Sub-Lieutenant Graves, a member of the boat's crew, recalled of those night time evacuations: "Our paddles left broad twin wakes, and on two occasions German aircraft followed those wakes until their end, and dropped bombs uncomfortably close. We were nothing if not resourceful, and devised oil bags that were lowered over the bow… to break the force of heavy waves. This was most successful – our brilliant wakes disappeared."

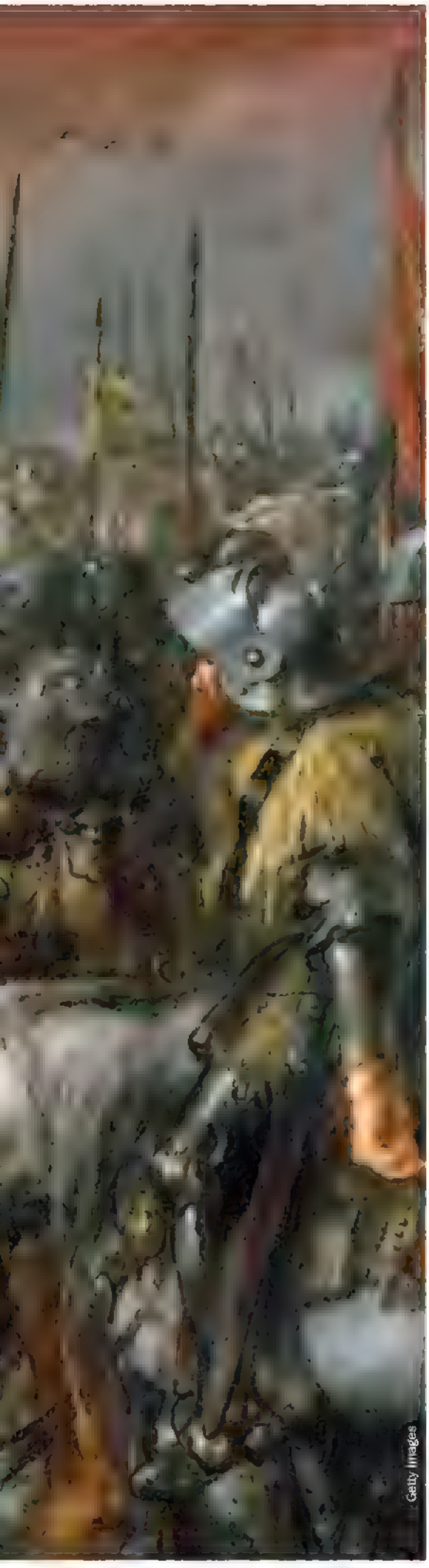
But the boat threw up a new hazard – bright sparks streaming from the funnel like fireworks, caused by soot catching flame. As the boat sailed back into Dunkirk – the town itself bright and burning at night – there was what Graves described as a "tragi-comic" scene, with buckets being passed from man to man to tip down the funnel to try and extinguish the blaze.

This, in turn, prompted a furious response from one man working in the engine room, who proclaimed, "I do not intend to be f**king well drowned on the job!"

The soldiers on that long jetty and in that wearyingly long queue; the flames of the town behind their back colouring the night sky; the ever-present German bombers flying overhead – there was little room for wider speculation. The immediate aim – to sit, to stand and wait, and keep a hold of one's nerve – was all encompassing. How much was there, though, in terms of thinking of defeat? Veterans now say that in the midst of the hunger and confusion, there was little chance for anyone to focus on such ideas. Early on the following day, however, news travelled down the line that the Belgian Army had surrendered to the Germans. Everyone from Churchill and the War Cabinet to Admiral Ramsay, and all those back home who were following events through the announcements of newsreaders, now understood that the British Army was on the brink of outright catastrophe.

This feature is an edited extract from Sinclair McKay's book *Dunkirk*, published by Aurum Press, RRP £20. It is available from www.aurumpress.co.uk

Sir John Gilbert's oil on canvas 'Morning of the Battle of Agincourt, 25th October 1415', painted in 1817, perfectly captures the mood of determined opposing forces preparing to engage in bloody warfare



Great Battles

AGINCOURT

Hundred Years War: The Battle of Agincourt pitted a tired English army against a French host five times its size, with the latter eager to prevent King Henry V from reaching Calais

THE ENGLISH SYSTEM OF MAKING war was, by the early 15th Century, well established. The firepower of longbow-armed archers, combined with the staying power of dismounted men-at-arms, was a potent force in a defensive battle.

The English longbowman in 1415 was little different than his predecessor who fought at Crécy or Halidon Hill. His main weapon had a combat range of 273 yards and could shoot perhaps 109 yards further. The plate armour of the time was difficult to penetrate, but the longbow was sufficiently powerful to drive an armour piercing bodkin arrow through it and into the man beneath at up to 55 yards. Conventional broadhead arrows could bring down an unarmoured man or a horse at greater distances. Most archers carried a back-up weapon. In some cases, this was a sword but more often it was a hatchet, dagger or maul – a huge, mace-like weapon that could be deadly in the hands of a strong man. Few archers wore armour of any sort. What there was included quilted or leather jerkins and a very basic helmet made of *cuir bouilli* – leather boiled in oil or wax to make it almost as hard as metal. Many of King Henry's troops were suffering from dysentery contracted during the recent siege of Harfleur. Thus, when some men went into action stripped to the waist, others chose to remove their hose for convenience instead.

All archers were professionals, recruited and paid for the campaign. They were well supplied with arrows and, more importantly, could shoot them quickly and accurately. At longer ranges, a cloud of arrows could be arched into any target, falling directly downwards to wound the horses' backs, and make looking up hazardous despite a visored helm. At close ranges, hitting a moving target such as a horse-mounted man was an easy shot for any archer competent enough to be able to hold up his head among his fellows. Most archers were good enough to aim for the head, and many men were shot through their visor.

MOST ARCHERS WERE GOOD ENOUGH TO AIM FOR THE HEAD, AND MANY MEN WERE SHOT THROUGH THEIR VISOR

The 750 or so English men-at-arms who accompanied King Henry were equipped in a full-body suit of plate armour, and armed with the knightly sidearm – a long sword. The sword was merely a back-up in most cases, however. To get through an enemy's armour, something more substantial was necessary. Thus, a mix of axes and maces was also borne, along with pole-axes and similarly lethal instruments. Henry's men-at-arms were accustomed to fighting on foot alongside the archers, though they were also skilled with the lance and in horsed combat.

The English army was wracked with disease, half-starved and tired from its long march. ▶

The facts

WHO An English army numbering around 5,700 under King Henry V, opposed by some 25,000 French soldiers under Charles d'Albret, Constable of France

WHAT The main action took place between French men-at-arms (mounted and dismounted), and a combined force of English archers and dismounted men-at-arms.

WHERE East of the village of Agincourt, between Abbeville and Calais in northern France

WHEN 25 October 1415

WHY Marching to winter in Calais, Henry's tired and sick army was brought to battle by a superior French force.

OUTCOME The French had aimed to fight a defensive action, but instead attacked down a narrow frontage between two woods. As a result, they suffered a shattering defeat.

It was not in good shape for a battle, never mind the fact that it was numerically inferior to the French army. However, it did have great confidence in its King, Henry V, who had demonstrated his courage and warrior skills at the recent (victorious) siege of Harfleur

Armour-piercing weapons

On the French side, the main striking force was, as usual, men-at-arms encased from head to foot in steel. Improvements in armour meant that the shield had largely been abandoned, permitting knights to fight with two-handed weapons on foot, and to have recourse to the sword only when disarmed. Specialist armour piercing weapons such as military picks were very much in evidence.

Although the French had lost some of their reluctance to fight on foot, the massed charge of lance-armed chivalry was still their ideal of warfare. Despite a string of humiliating defeats at the hands of the English, the French seemed determined to disprove the old adage that "defeat breeds innovation". This was, as much as anything, for social reasons

Longbowmen depicted in a 15th-century manuscript. Their only armour is a helmet of metal or leather. The bowmen are shown with a sheaf of arrows stuck in their belt. At Agincourt, many stuck arrows in the ground in front of them for convenience

The feudal system in France included a sharp divide between the ruling class, whose right and responsibility was to bear arms, and the peasantry, who were generally ground underfoot and had to be kept disarmed to reduce the chances of a rebellion. The miserable performance of peasant levies whenever they were taken to the battlefield had served to further convince the French nobility of the futility of arming the lower orders. There was, therefore, no proud yeoman class from which to recruit footsoldiers, nor any desire to create one. The idea of arming peasants made French noblemen uneasy, and rightly so. What good was victory over the English if the way of life of the French rulers was swept away in the process?

THE FRENCH SEEMED DETERMINED TO PROVE THE OLD ADAGE THAT "DEFEAT BREEDS INNOVATION"

And so, as always, it was the upper echelons of society who came to the field of Agincourt with banners flying, their numbers filled out by professional men-at-arms who might aspire to winning a knighthood on the field. The rivalry between these noble warriors, whose status in society depended upon what they did on the field of battle, made them impetuous and unreliable. Their charge would be furious, but it was also uncontrolled. One concession to the dominance of the English archer was to provide many of the knights' horses with barding – horse armour – to give them a measure of protection. In earlier battles, the charge of the knights had foundered as their mounts were shot down. The French hoped that even if barding slowed their mounts, it would enable more of them to reach the enemy line. The French also brought a force of some 3,000 crossbowmen and some early cannon to the field, though they played little part in the battle.

Dangerous march

The Battle of Agincourt was part of the so-called Hundred Years War (actually 1337 1453) between England and France. The war was not continuous, and at times subsided into an uneasy peace of sorts.

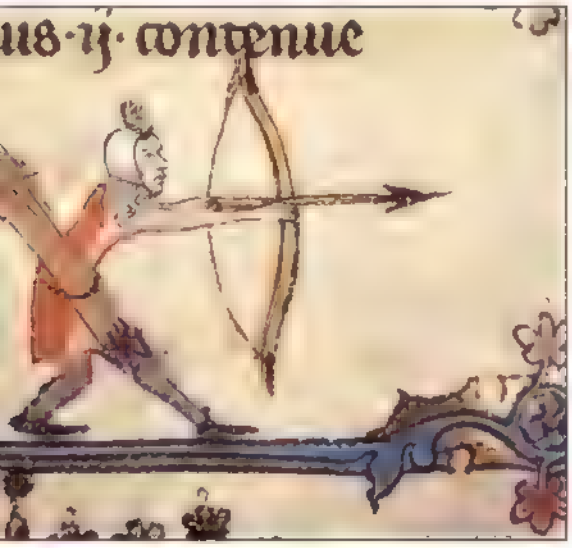
In 1415, France was weakened by civil war, and Henry V of England decided that the time was right to resume hostilities. In mid 1415, his army landed in France and laid siege to the fortress of Harfleur. Five weeks later, despite dysentery and all the other hardships of siege, Henry had captured the fortress. He then set off with what remained of his army to march to Calais, intending to winter there

The French, intimidated by their string of defeats, tended to adopt a very defensive stance when the English attacked. In practice, this meant withdrawing into fortresses and surrendering the initiative to their enemy However, with a clearly far superior force at hand, the Constable of France, Charles d'Albret, decided to bring the English to battle. His men placed stakes and broke down the banks at river crossings, making the Englishmen's march a lengthy and dangerous one.

Henry's army was already short of provisions as it set out for Calais. Struggling to find a usable river crossing wasted more time, but at length the army managed to cross the

ENGLISH MAN-AT-ARMS AND ARCHER

English men-at-arms (a term that embraced knights, squires and some non-noble warriors) were always prepared to dismount to fight alongside the archers, who were their social inferiors. These longbowmen usually deployed on the flanks or in broken ground to give them protection against more heavily armed opponents, should it come to hand-to-hand fighting. At Agincourt, King Henry V ordered that every archer should cut himself a stake to provide portable protection against cavalry charges. This worked to great effect in defeating the French. The miserable state of the English army, starving and living on filthy water, is shown in the archer's need to let down his breeches, due to diarrhoea.



Henry V (centre, with crowned helm) was a fearsome warrior who personally saved the life of the Duke of Gloucester during the battle. More than great speeches, such deeds inspired his followers to fight on when things looked bleak

Somme at Saint-Quentin. Struggling onward, the sick and weary English then found d'Albret's powerful host camped across its line of march. With his men starving and soaked by a downpour during the night, Henry nevertheless resolved to fight his way through to safety.

Mounted charge

Knowing very well that the English were short of food – and wishing to avoid a repeat of previous defeats, where French charges had battered themselves to pieces on a static English line – d'Albret was determined to force the outnumbered enemy to come to him. By refusing to attack, he would force the English into moving forward. His enemy was constrained by his lack of supplies, while d'Albret had all the advantages – numbers, mobility and position. He could wait, Henry could not.

D'Albret's force was drawn up in three battles, as was usual. The front and second lines were mostly dismounted, while the third was composed of mounted men. The 3,000 crossbowmen attached to the French force were also in the rear, where they could achieve little.

Given what had happened to the Genoese at Crécy, the crossbowmen were probably grateful that at least they would not be ridden down by their own side. D'Albret also positioned two forces of mounted men-at-arms, each numbering around 600 men, on the flanks. He hoped to be able to launch a mounted charge directly at the English archers and either scatter them or at least distract them from shooting into the main attack. The force assigned to make this assault included many knights mounted on barded horses. D'Albret was sure that Henry could be induced to attack, which would in turn lead to the ruin of the English army.

Protective hedge

The English deployed in what had become the conventional manner, with three blocks of men-at-arms flanked by triangular formations of archers. The centre block was commanded by Henry himself, with the right commanded by Edward, Duke of York, and the left by Lord Camoys. Henry knew of the French plan to destroy his archers, and came up with a counter to it. During the march, the archers were commanded to furnish themselves with long stakes, sharpened at both ends. These were rammed into the ground in front of and among the archer formations, pointing forward and offering a measure of protection against an enemy charge. The archers were easily able to step around the stakes and move within their protective hedge, but to a horseman approaching at speed the chances of being impaled were considerable. Some of the men were charged with uprooting the stakes and moving them if the archers were ordered to change position.

Henry's flanks were protected by woods. On the right lay Tramcourt woods, and on the left were Agincourt woods. To the rear lay the English baggage camp, virtually undefended. Some accounts claim that Henry placed archers and men-at-arms in the woods, but this is unlikely. The English scarcely had enough men to form a line and could not afford a reserve, let alone a flanking force.

While the English nobles and men-at-arms knew that they might expect some degree of mercy from their enemies, there was no ▶

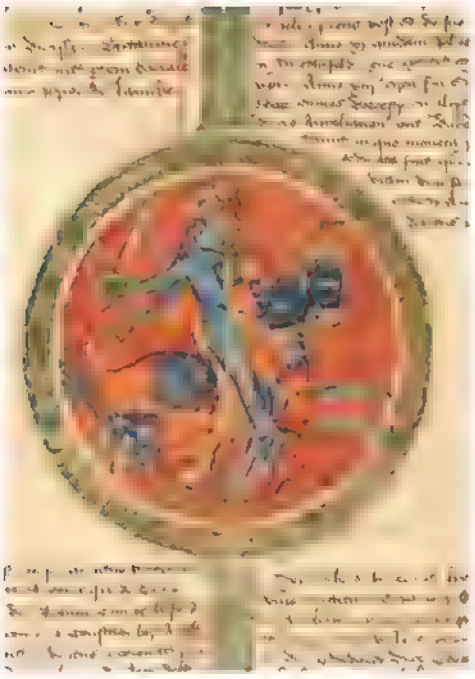
A portrait of King Henry V by Benjamin Derrett

6 The French mounted reserve launches a last futile charge, but is repulsed. Many French prisoners are executed in the confusion.
3 The cavalry routs back into the dismounted French second line, hurling it into confusion.
2 Flanking French cavalry units launch charges on the English archers, but are repelled by arrows and stakes.

Great Battles

AGINCOURT
25 OCTOBER 1415

1 A heavily outnumbered English battle line of dismounted men-at-arms flanked by archers advances on the French.
ENGLISH CAMP
4 The French main body struggles into position to attack the English but is overwhelmed, with many of its leaders subsequently taken prisoner.
5 An outflanking French force attacks the English baggage, killing its attendants and pillaging Henry's treasure.



At Agincourt, King Henry fought on foot, but the horse was a powerful status symbol. Thus, in this manuscript illustration showing the seal of the King, he is depicted as a mounted warrior bearing a sword – another symbol of power and rank

such hope for the common soldier. So hated were the infamous longbowmen that 300 had been hanged after the fall of Soissons to the French. Indeed, one reason for the provision of stakes to the archers was the rumour that the French intended to make a "dead set" against the archers and massacre them at the first possible opportunity.

Their preparations made, the two armies faced one another across the sodden ground. Each waited for the other to attack. For four hours, the stand-off continued.

Eventually, Henry was forced to act. If the French would not attack, he would have to advance against them. It seemed that the enemy had learned from their previous headlong attacks. There was little chance for the tiny English army to make a successful assault, but there was no alternative. At the command to advance, the English crossed themselves, the archers pulled up their stakes and the whole force slowly moved forward. Eventually, having paused more than once to allow the men-at-arms to rest and maintain their formation, the English reached longbow range. The archers re-emplaced their stakes and began to shoot.

Taken prisoner

The English halted at bow range and opened a steady fire on the front battle of the French army, which had no means of reply. The only troops able to match the archers at that range – the French crossbowmen – were far to the rear and unable to contribute to the action. The French were forced to take the offensive after all, or else stand under fire all day. First, the cavalry of the flanking forces advanced against the archers on the English flanks. The flanking forces were smaller than they should have been, due to command and control issues that resulted in many knights being out of position or deployed in the wrong units.

Despite this, the flanking cavalry made a brave attempt. On the English left flank, the charge was broken up by archery and the majority of the force turned back. Three knights pressed the attack but were soon brought down. On the right, the assault fared a little better

MEN DROWNED IN THE MUD OR SUFFOCATED UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THEIR ARMOUR OR THAT OF OTHERS

Part of the force managed to come to handstrokes, despite the re-emplaced stakes and intense archery. The attack was quickly repulsed, however.

Meanwhile, the lead battle, under d'Albret and the Duke of Orléans, began to advance. The going was slow, through ankle-deep mud churned up by the cavalry and weighed down by armour. Even for the mounted men, the pace was not fast. This was no headlong charge but a steady advance coming forward at a slow walk, and it offered a perfect target for the English longbowmen. As d'Albret's force pushed forward, it was disrupted by the routing cavalry and riderless horses of the initial attack.

The formation was also compressed onto a smaller frontage by the woods, which acted as a funnel. The French force was bunched together as it approached the shorter English line. So tightly compressed were the French that some men struggled to find room to wield their weapons. Two-handed swords, then just entering service, were useless in the press.

The lead French battle finally came into contact with the English line, and a fierce mêlée developed. Unable to shoot, the archers took to their hand weapons and assailed the French alongside their armoured companions. Although the French had the advantage of greater numbers, they were exhausted by their laborious advance and, jammed together, could not fight effectively. Many men were killed or taken prisoner in the fighting. Offensive weapons were not the only killers in that desperate struggle – a man-at-arms who slipped or fell wounded into the thick mud had little chance of rising easily, even if he was not trampled down by others.

The Battle of Poitiers, fought on 19 September 1356, was the second great battlefield defeat of the French by the English during the Hundred Years War

Men drowned in the mud or suffocated under the weight of their armour and that of others. This fate befell the Duke of York. Still others were slain by the vengeful longbowmen, who dispatched downed noblemen with a knife through the joints in their armour, or beat them to death with mauls

The second French battle came up to support the first, and the battle intensified. The Count d'Alencon and a party of knights, sworn to kill King Henry or die trying, cut their way through to the English monarch, who was fighting heroically in the front rank. Henry covered himself with glory once more, coming to the rescue of the Duke of Gloucester, who was in serious trouble at d'Alencon's hands.

Although part of the crown that surrounded his helm was cut away, Henry emerged victorious. Eventually, d'Alencon's assault was beaten off and his band of knights were dispatched. The French assault gradually ebbed and the English eyed the third French battle – as yet uncommitted – across the corpse-strewn ground.

Battered force

King Henry boldly sent a herald to the remaining French battle, saying that it must leave the field immediately or receive no quarter. Having seen what had happened to the other two-thirds of their army, the men of the third battle complied

Even as the French third battle was retreating, one of its leaders, known simply as de Fauquemberg, scraped together a force and made a minor, though determined, attack through the knee-deep mud and the carnage of previous assaults. At much the same time, the local lord, Isambert d'Azincourt, made an attack into the English rear with his own forces.

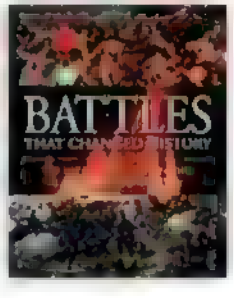
The English were at this time occupied with the removal of prisoners to the rear, and with reorganising their weary army. Then came word that the French had attacked the baggage camp. This meant that an enemy force of unknown size was in the English rear area and might at any moment fall upon Henry's battered force. Worse, the French third battle had returned to the field and begun to slowly advance

Henry did not have enough men to guard the prisoners, repulse the force in his rear and face the remainder of the French army. The order was given to put the prisoners to the sword, since they posed a severe threat if they obtained weapons. However, although the baggage was plundered, the threat posed by d'Azincourt's force proved to be minor and it was driven off, at which point the remaining prisoners were spared.

The rallied French forces, though still outnumbering Henry's entire force, thought better of pressing their attack against the English line. They drew off, leaving the field in English hands and the road to Calais open. Henry was able to reach Calais with what remained of his army, though he was not in a position to pursue the beaten French and make more of his victory.

Agincourt was the third of a trio of great English victories – after Crécy and Poitiers – won by English archers over heavily armoured French men-at-arms The battle cost France half of its nobility, including three Dukes, 90 other nobles and something like 1,560 men-at-arms. Around 200 more were captured. The English lost around 400 men.

While the total dominance of the English archer was drawing to an end by 1415, thanks largely to the emergence of gunpowder and the increasing use of firearms, the pattern of victories of steady English troops over aggressively advancing Frenchmen would continue for many years. Four centuries later, during the Napoleonic Wars, the Duke of Wellington observed that the French continued to come on in the old manner, and that the English continued to defeat them in the old manner

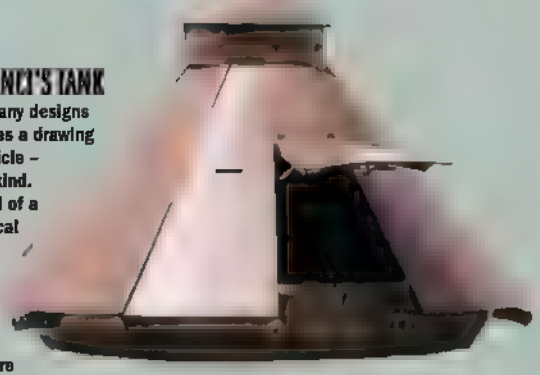


This feature is an edited extract from the book *Battles That Changed History*, published by Amber Books, RRP £24.99 It is available from www.amberbooks.co.uk

Military MILESTONES

TANKS

From Da Vinci's conical contraption, to the Soviets' WWII killing machine, to a vehicle that currently knocks spots off its rivals, Steve Jarratt looks at history's **speediest, sturdiest and deadliest** armoured vehicles...



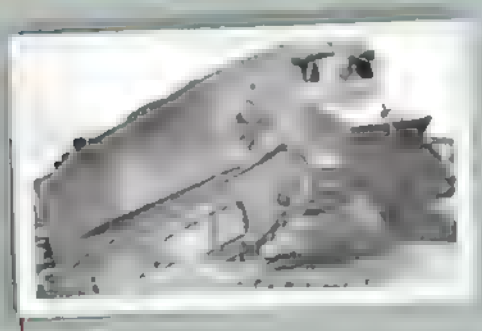
LEONARDO DA VINCI'S TANK

Among Da Vinci's many designs for war machines was a drawing of an armoured vehicle – the very first of its kind. Inspired by the shell of a turtle, the low, conical device ran on four wheels and held eight men – six to hand-crank the machine into battle, and two to fire the 20 small cannons adorning the outer rim. It was a fascinating design and pre-dated the first mechanical tank by some 400 years. In 2003, the Royal Engineers built and tested a full-scale version for a BBC documentary, proving that it worked and would have been an effective device for breaking enemy lines.

1917 RENAULT FT

Built by the Renault Automobile Company, the innovative FT-17 introduced the concept of a rotating gun turret and, despite its diminutive size (it was just 16 feet long and less than six feet wide), is regarded as the first modern tank. The turret sat on a ring of ball bearings and was turned manually by the gunner. While early models were fitted with Hotchkiss machine guns, later editions gained the 37mm Pateaux cannon. The FT proved hugely successful: more than 12,000 were built during the First World War, and following the armistice, tanks were shipped abroad and deployed in a number of further conflicts in Europe, Russia and China.

1500 1800 1900 1905 1910 1915 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945 1950

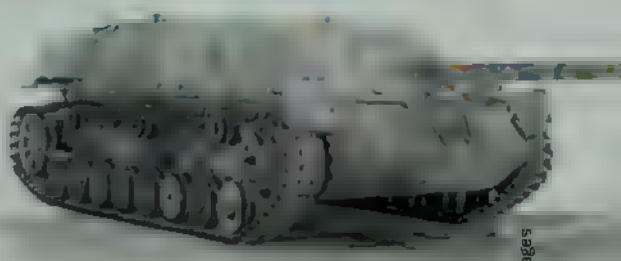


1915 LITTLE WILLIE

Various tank designs had been in circulation prior to WWI, including one by French Captain Léon Levavasseur. However, the first mechanised-tank prototype was the No 1 Lincoln Machine, aka "Little Willie", built by William Foster & Company of Lincoln. The work was initiated by the British Landships Committee, formed with the intention of devising a vehicle capable of traversing a five-foot trench. The track assemblies, which came from US tractors, sagged and could become detached, so a new system was devised that kept the tracks connected to the wheels. The term "tank" was introduced as a codename for the machine, and the Landships Committee was renamed to the less-provocative Tank Supply Committee.

1916 BRITISH MARK I

Even though Little Willie's shape closely resembled today's vehicles, in tests it was deemed ineffective at crossing trenches. It was therefore suggested that tracks run around the circumference of a tank, promoting the rhomboid scheme of the Mark I. The first production models came in male and female variants: the former with two six-pounder guns and three Hotchkiss machine guns; the latter with four Vickers machine guns and one Hotchkiss. Amazingly, the relatively small vehicle held a crew of eight men. The Mark I quickly evolved and a further nine models were produced before the end of the war.



Getty Images

1939 PANZER IV

The Panzerkampfwagen IV was the workhorse of the German tank corps, and saw combat in many theatres throughout the Second World War, including the Western Front and North Africa. Although it was initially intended as an infantry support tank, it soon superseded the lighter and less-effective Panzer III to become the main medium tank – especially after the Germans encountered the Soviet T-34 in 1941. The chassis provided the basis for a number of variants, including anti-aircraft vehicles, command and observation tanks, and the turret-less Jagdpanzer tank-destroyer. In total, around 8,500 Panzer IVs were built during the war, and the machine continued to see service around the world up until 1967.

1940 RUSSIAN T-34

This medium tank proved to be one of the best fighting vehicles of WWII. It was fast and agile, had good firepower thanks to its three-inch high-velocity gun, and its sloping sides provided excellent protection against shells and anti-tank weapons, by presenting a thicker cross-section of metal without adding extra weight. The tank was relatively simple to manufacture and by the end of the war, the Russians had built more than 35,000 of them. This was the biggest production run of any tank until it was overtaken by the T-54/55, with numbers estimated at between 86,000 and 100,000. The effectiveness of the T-34 helped turn the tide of the war in the east, and came as a shock to the German military. Ironically, Hitler once stated that if he'd known of the tank's performance, he would have cancelled the assault on Russia.

1945 CENTURION

The British Centurion was developed in order to better combat the 88mm gun of the German Tiger, while providing improved reliability. However, the original 40-ton model was rapidly replaced by the 50-ton MkII, which had the level of armour needed to withstand a Tiger attack. The Centurion also featured the new 84mm "20-pounder gun" and a 27-litre Rolls-Royce Meteor engine, delivering 35mph. After WWII, the Centurion enjoyed success in a number of conflicts, most notably during the retreat at the Battle of the Imjin River in Korea, and during the Yom Kippur War, when fewer than a hundred Israeli Centurions defeated 500 Russian-built T-55 and T-62 tanks of the Syrian Army.

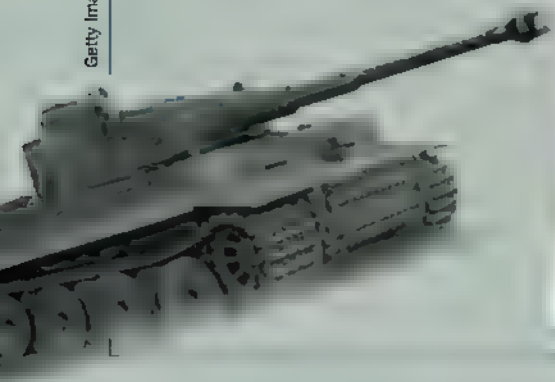
2010 LEOPARD 2A7

Regarded as one of the best tanks currently available, the Leopard 2 series has been in service with the German Army since 1979. The current incarnation outperforms the Abrams M1A2, the Challenger 2 and the French Leclerc in terms of protection, firepower and mobility. Like all modern main battle tanks, the Leopard 2A7 comes with state-of-the-art armour and technology. It's clad in a composite of hardened metal, tungsten, ceramics and plastics, and has been upgraded to better withstand RPGs, improvised explosive devices and mines. Despite weighing over 60 tonnes, the Leopard can travel at up to 45mph.

1955 1960 1965 1970 1975 1985 1990 1995 2000 2005 2010 2015

1942 TIGER I

As a response to the Soviet T-34, the German military commissioned a heavy tank weighing over 50 tons and capable of bearing an 88mm gun. The resulting Panzer VI was renamed the Tiger on Adolf Hitler's orders, and rushed onto the battlefield. This hasty introduction resulted in a number of reliability issues, though the tank was continually developed over the course of the war. When it first appeared, the Tiger was arguably the best tank available and, despite its huge weight, was surprisingly agile. Its heavy armour, speed and formidable weaponry gave it a fearsome reputation, but it was complex and expensive to build, and only around 1,300 ever made it into service.



Getty Images

M1 ABRAMS

This 60-ton US main battle tank makes it onto our list as the first to bear Chobham armour. Developed in the UK, this is a composite material made of ceramics and metal with layers of elastic, and able to soak up the impact of an enemy shell. The Abrams first saw action in Operation Desert Storm during the Gulf War, where the M1A1 variant proved itself against the technically inferior Russian T-55s and T-62s of the Iraqi Army. While its 120mm gun has a range of 2.5km, it is susceptible to attack from RPGs, which was partially resolved by the addition of the Tank Urban Survival Kit (TUSK) – a mixture of armour to the sides and rear – plus thermal gun sights.

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1983 CHALLENGER

This British main battle tank was designed to replace the ageing Chieftain in service with Iran, but the fall of the Shah in 1979 meant that the British Army picked up the order instead. The vehicle features Chobham armour and is powered by a 26-litre Rolls-Royce engine delivering 1,200hp, and Hydrogas suspension providing improved performance across rough terrain. Unlike other NATO tanks, the Challenger uses the rifled 120mm Royal Ordnance L11 gun, which produces a more stable flight, and a Challenger is credited with the longest tank-to-tank kill during the Gulf War, when it hit an Iraqi T-72 from over three miles away. The Challenger 1 was replaced in 1998 by the revamped Challenger 2, which is still in use by the British Army.

ALEC READER

For so many young men in 1915, the urge to "join up before the war is over by Christmas" was intense. Alec Reader was no exception, though he was underage when he joined the Civil Service Rifles. He was within weeks of being released when he died on the Somme. Alec's nephews, Roger and Doug Goodman, spent many years tracing his First World War service, as Doug explains here...

If you happen to be reading this article on 15 September, please join my family in remembering Bertram Alec Reader, Private No 3626, 47th Division London, Prince of Wales's Own Civil Service Rifles.

"Alec" died at around 08.00 on 15 September 1916, at High Wood on the Somme, France. While this battle to capture the German switch trench and take over the wood's commanding spot is not as well known as the battle on 1 July, it generated over 8,000 casualties on both sides and marked the first time tanks were deployed. The attack on High Wood did succeed in pushing the Germans back, but cost the lives of many men of the Civil Service Rifles, including Alec Reader.

But before we look in detail at his short Army career, let's go back a few years...

Alec's birth certificate is dated 8.12.1897 – just three months after his parents were married. His father, Frederick, was 19, and his mother, Rose, just 17. Family rumours suggest that Fred forged the marriage certificate to indicate that the wedding had taken place some 12 months before Alec's birth. Even during the last few years of Queen Victoria's reign, the stigma of being born so soon after a wedding was considerable. The Reader family lived at Number 4, North Side, Wandsworth Common, London, in a big red-brick house complete with servants' quarters and a large garden.

Alec's father was area manager for JCDecaux, a bill-poster company. Look at any large advertising hoarding and you'll see the name JCDecaux still going strong after well over a hundred years. Number 4, North Side still stands today, and a photograph of the nearby Emanuel School's cadet force marching past (see page 86) clearly shows the building. The Reader family grew from one child, born in 1897, to five more, born between 1900 and 1918. They were Arthur, Minnie, Barbara, Constance and Mary – one brother and four sisters to Alec.

Alec's education began at Lavender Hill School, a short walk from his home. On 14 September 1909, aged 11, he began attending Emanuel School. His records reveal that he was a conscientious worker and good at various different sports – particularly running. But he was probably not considered sixth-form material or suitable for university.

Seized by excitement

After leaving Emanuel School in 1913, Alec joined the Civil Service as a Post Office clerk, and, of course, it was soon after that that war broke out. By 1915, he had become seized by the excitement among the men back home, and was caught up in the desire to enlist before the war was over. He was only 17 years old at the time, so should have been turned down. But, as in so many cases when underage lads volunteered, he was accepted because he looked over 18 (other boys lied about their age or, if the recruiting officer knew their real age, were told to walk around the block and come back later).

In the summer of 1915, Alec went to Somerset House in London, where young men could join the 15th Battalion London Regiment, Prince of Wales's Own Civil Service Rifles (CSR).

His choice of the CSR was probably influenced by posters at his office and recruiting leaflets urging men to "Join the Regiment and don't wait for conscription".

Alec enlisted on August 1915, along with several of his pals from the Post Office. He became Private Bertram Alec Reader, number 3623, four months short of his 18th birthday. And so began 13 months of intensive training as a rifleman and a bomb-thrower. His first letter home to his mother, dated 12 August 1915 from Richmond Park Camp, read:

Dear Ma,
Hope all at home are better than I am, as I have poisoned my heel and am in a bad way. I can't walk 20 yards without my foot throbbing painfully. We are going strong down here – eggs yesterday and a kipper each today for breakfast. 120 men go to Queensmere every morning for a swim. I should go tomorrow, but for the foot.

If I can get a weekend pass this week, I shall be home on Saturday afternoon. But if it can't be worked, I shall be glad to see you all on Sunday afternoon down here.

The camp will be deserted, so there will be plenty of room for you. If I'm not home by five on Saturday, you will know that I couldn't work a pass.

From his subsequent letters, it's evident that Alec enjoyed Army life and found the outdoor and sporting activities to his liking.

Heavy fighting

Alec was billeted in Barnes with the Dubois family, so he wasn't too far from his own family in Wandsworth. By January 1916, he was becoming accustomed to Army life and had begun training at Hazeley Down, near Winchester in Hampshire. Alec wrote to his brother, Arthur, describing the camp as very large and populated by Canadians, Welsh and many other nationalities.

Leave in February was cancelled, as his battalion was put on draft, which meant that the troops could be sent abroad at short notice. On 24 February, Alec wrote to his mother, informing her that they had been told to prepare to leave for Southampton. In his next letter home, he commented, "The heavy fighting about to take place in March will finish the war one way or another." He went on to state that seven days' leave would be due in six months, "so all being well, you will see me before I'm 19".

Alec arrived in Le Havre and wrote home:

"Hope you received my card alright. I wasn't allowed to write letters from there, and you have to be careful not to say anything of importance. It was very rough indeed when we crossed. In fact, there were only three chaps in the boat who were not sick. Another experience of mine has been a railway journey of 180 miles in 21 hours. We started at 10am and arrived at 7am the next morning, owing to the fact that the railways here are like some tramways in England (a single line with doubles at intervals). The journey was somewhat tedious. We had to sleep eight in a carriage and were accordingly rather cramped. Since I left England, I haven't seen any bread, and I've been living on bully and dog biscuits since I landed. I drew five Francs today, the first

Alec stands proudly in his military uniform, in the company of his family (this picture was taken before his youngest sibling was born)

money I have had for the last four days. If you haven't already sent the money along, please do so, as I need it badly.

On 1 April, Alec experienced the real war:

Last night's affair was a wash-out. We were taken up the line in lorries and dumped in a ruined village. There, we drew picks and shovels, and marched up to reserve trenches for digging. We started out at 7pm and got back at 3am. Reveille at 7.30am this morning. Several large shells burst on our left, and machine guns were very active at first, but towards midnight things quietened down, and it seems as though hostilities have ceased for the night.

He wrote to his mother again on 7 April:

Re: the working party. We marched up to a trench about 30 yards behind the frontline, and started deepening it. As there was heavy fighting in this part of the line last autumn, we kept digging up tunics, trousers, bones, etc. In fact, it was quite a ghastly job. We had no sooner started than a battery opened fire only 100 yards behind (they make the earth shake), and they kept it up for two hours. After the first quarter of an hour, the Germans tried to find it. The first shells burst a quarter of a mile away, and they gradually got nearer, until they burst not 20 yards in front. Then it got exciting – every time we heard a whizz, down we had to go among the aforementioned tunics, etc, in order to dodge the splinters. This state of affairs lasted about a quarter of an hour – although it seemed a lot longer – and then our battery had to give up and clear out. Soon after this, it started raining and, after working for two hours in the downpour, we came back soaked to the skin and covered with slush, faces and all (for, of course, when shells burst near you, you get down as low as poss. In fact, at first, I was so nervy that I buried my head in the mud – and I was not the only one, either.)

"AT FIRST, I WAS SO NERVY THAT I BURIED MY HEAD IN THE MUD – AND I WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE, EITHER"

Later on, Alec's brother Arthur composed a letter in reply, in which he asked for a Victoria Cross. To this, Alec replied:

You ask me to get the Victoria Cross – well, let me tell you a little secret. The only men out here who get given a distinction are those who lose their heads or have too many rum rations. The sensible ones get themselves down into the bottom of the trench when things get a little bit hot, and they are the men who "live to fight another day".

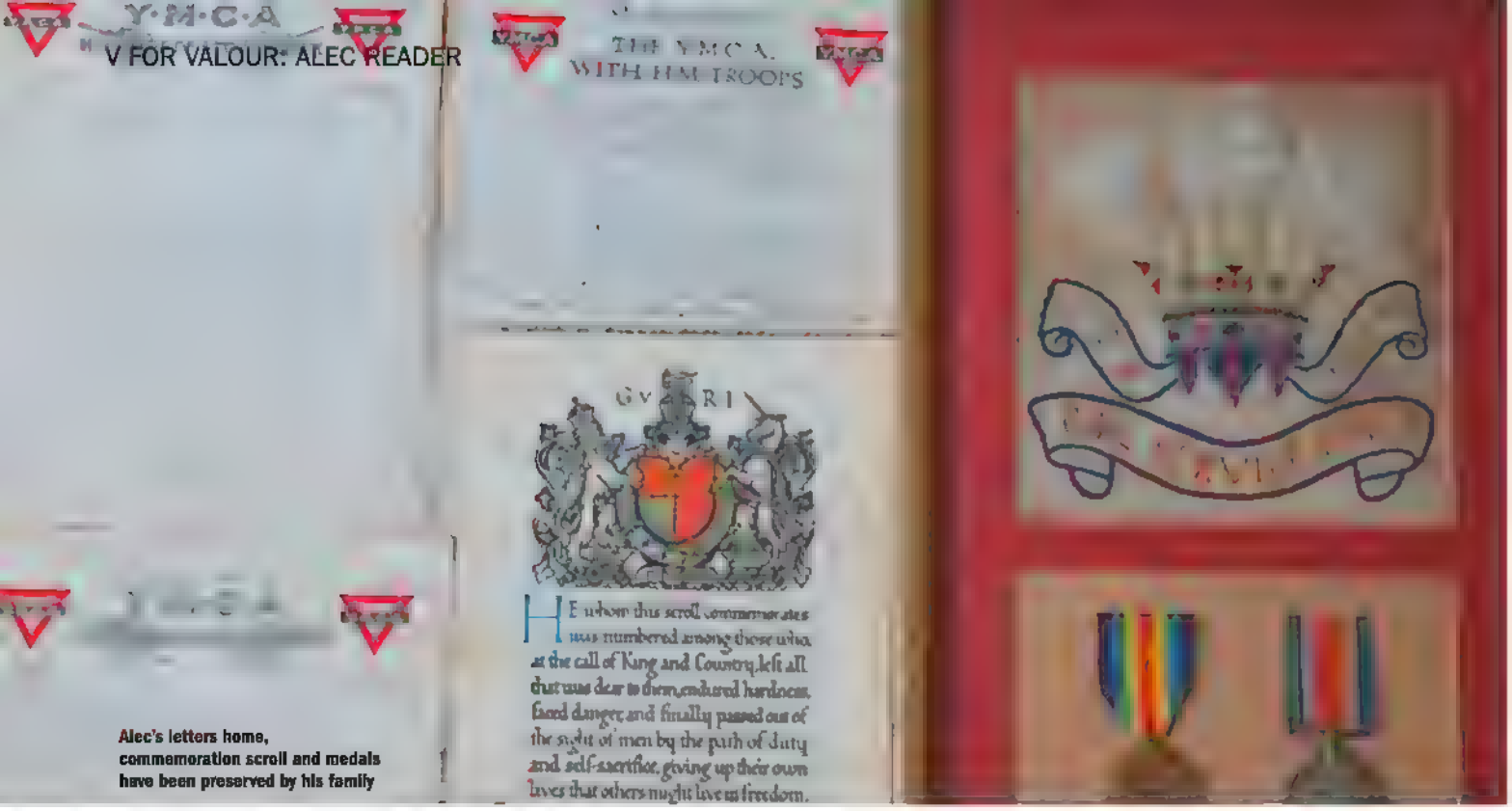
Alec displayed much humour in his letters home. His response to the iconic propaganda poster "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?" was, "Dug up half of France, sonny!"

On 4 May, Alec wrote another letter:

"I have undergone the various emotions caused by war, and have seen most things that happen in war, and I don't think much of it. I have seen mines (three) go up, have been knocked down by the explosion of an aerial torpedo (they kill by concussion at 20 yards), have seen men killed and wounded, and have had to carry a mortally wounded man to a dressing station on a stretcher. The poor chap was dying fast and knew it. It was awful. A mine went up under the battalion on our right, and caused over a hundred casualties. War is a rotten game.

Soon after, Alec was sent on a bombing course, and subsequently wrote to his mother:

Dropped you a card yesterday to let you know I am alright. We have had a pretty rotten time lately, but it's no use my telling you, as you must have read the papers. We have read the papers. We have been [at this point, the letter was censored, but it remained readable] over the top and lost [the letter was then censored again, but this time was not legible]. Please send me some socks as soon as poss, as all my stuff has been blown to bits. Also, a small sponge for washing. ▶


Y·M·C·A
THE Y.M.C.A.
WITH H.M. TROOPS
GV R I
HE whose name this scroll commemorates
was numbered among those who
at the call of King and Country, left all
that was dear to them, endured hardness,
faced danger and finally passed out of
the sight of men by the path of duty
and self-sacrifice, giving up their own
lives that others might live in freedom.

Alec's letters home, commemoration scroll and medals have been preserved by his family

A further letter described going "over the top":

We went "over the top". A most unpleasant job. Yesterday, I wrote to you but the regimental censor was so annoyed with the amount of verboten matter in my letter that he destroyed it. Please send me socks as soon as you can, as I lost all my stuff last time up. A shell apparently landed right on my pack – all I could find of it afterwards was one of the buckles. I have now got a casualty's stuff, but he was very careless with his socks – they have all got holes in them.

In June 1916, Alec was twice hospitalised – once from flu and once from inhaling gas. By now, his father had joined the Balloon Training School, part of the Royal Flying Corps – perhaps a plan to be stationed near his son. "The Big Push" on 1 July was eventful, as Alec reported:

We have been in the line for seven days now. The fist four were spent in the "line of resistance" – a fairly rotten time – but now we are in nice, deep dugouts, and if it would only stop raining all would be well. As it is, the rain drips through the dugout incessantly. Everything is soaked but our spirits, which apparently can't be drowned, and it is a case of water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink. Still, it's not a bad war at present.

In July, an Army order announced that men between 18 and 19 were to be sent home, but could remain with their battalion if they wished.

IN JUNE 1916, ALEC WAS TWICE HOSPITALISED – ONCE FROM FLU AND THE SECOND TIME FROM INHALING GAS

Alec wrote home:

The temptation to get out of this ghastly business is far greater than you could possibly conceive – but, of course, there's only one decent thing for me to do, and that is to stay here. But, oh! It's going to be very hard.

It was suggested that Alec should transfer to the balloon section, but he declined, saying that it wasn't the same thing. He said he had decided to stay with his pals, and to "stick it out until he got knocked out".

In August, after prolonged marching, Alec was struck down with septic feet, and was admitted to hospital in a "fairly comfortable location". He thought he'd be home within a few months.

He wrote to his brother:

If the war's not over before, I shall be home next February on leave. Of course, I shall stand a very good chance of a "Blighty one" during the next three weeks, so don't be surprised to wake up one morning and find me at the Third London General Hospital.

However, bureaucratic hold-ups delayed any transfer back to England and, as Alec recovered, the opportunity passed.

In early September, the CSR began preparing for a major attack on High Wood on the Somme. This wood held the high ground that dominated the area, so the British forces were eager to

Alec Reader's timeline

1897
8 DECEMBER
Bertram Alec Reader is born in Lambeth, the first of six children for Frederick and Rose Reader.

1909
14 SEPTEMBER
Aged 11, Alec (as he becomes known) starts attending Emanuel School in Battersea. His school records reveal that he was a hard worker and a keen sportsman.

1913
UNSPECIFIED
Alec graduates from Emanuel School and takes up a position as a Post Office clerk.

1914
AUGUST
War breaks out in Europe. The news is initially greeted with enthusiasm by many young British men, who clamour to join the forces in search of adventure in a foreign land.

1915
AUGUST
Unable to resist any longer, Alec travels to Somerset House in London with his friends from the Post Office, and enlists for the Prince of Wales's Own Civil Service Rifles. At just 17 years old, he is underage.

AUGUST
Alec begins 13 months of intensive training, beginning at Richmond Park Camp in London. During this time, he hones his skills as a rifleman and a bomb-thrower.

Old shells, found at High Wood many years after WWI finished, await disposal

capture it. After a short bombardment, the 47th Division attacked High Wood at dawn on 15 September.

The very last letter from Alec, dated 12 September 1916, arrived home a few days after the battle:

Dear Ma,
Am now resting after a brute of a constitutional this morning. We are in bivouacs made for 20, and there are 40 of us, so we take it in turns, half in at a time. For amusement, having no money, we do some small game-hunting. Now for a sleep. We were up at 1.45am, and I have been on my feet ever since (it is now 2pm).
Au revoir,
Your loving son

Alec had just 68 hours to live

As a child, I remember looking at a bound volume of First World War magazines, and wondering what it was all about. Later, I asked my mother about Uncle Alec, having seen a photograph of him on a mantlepiece. But all she ever said was, "The Germans killed our Alec."

I suppose I lost interest in the Great War, and I wasn't taught 20th-century history at Emanuel School, but I do remember sitting in the school's chapel next to the Role of Honour that was dedicated to the boys killed in the war, and reading the name "B. A. Reader".

A proper burial

Alec's grave in High Wood, where he died on 15 September 1916, was marked and the location noted. It was in the wood's north-west corner, just in front of the German switch trench.

Soon after his death, his mother received a letter saying that Alec's body had been found near the wood's edge and properly buried For years, she tried to find out the place of burial, but in 1923 the Imperial War Graves Commission told her that, although the area had been searched and the remains of all soldiers buried in isolated graves had been re-buried in cemeteries, the last resting place of Private B. A. Reader had not been identified. So, as time passed, Alec's life became forgotten.

And that might have remained the case had his 77 letters home to his family not fallen ▶

HIGH WOOD

High Wood – or Bois des Fourcaux as the French call it – can be found almost two miles north-west of Longueval on the D107. The London Cemetery sits opposite what is now a private wood, and close by is the 47th London Division monument.

The wood is around half a square mile and used by local hunters. The outline of trenches can be seen clearly, and rusty metal objects from a hundred years ago are still to be found. It's said that one of the tanks deployed on 15 September is buried in High Wood.

In 1916, a wooden cross was erected there to honour the fallen. This was replaced in the 1920s by another, "permanent" memorial but, due to subsidence, this was rebuilt many years later. The memorial pays tribute to the 47 courageous men of the 47th Division who died on 15 September, and to the others of the same division who are among the 3,874 buried in the London Cemetery.

1916

24 FEBRUARY
After a short period of training at Hazeley Down, near Winchester in Hampshire, Alec writes to his mother informing her that he and his fellow recruits have been told to prepare to leave for war.

JUNE
The realities of war hit home for Alec as he is twice hospitalised: the first time due to flu, the second from inhaling gas.

JULY
An Army order announces that men of 18 and 19 years old can return home, although this is not compulsory. Alec is among those who choose to stay and fight. It turns out to be a fateful decision.

12 SEPTEMBER
Alec writes his final letter home. He sounds exhausted but in generally good spirits.

15 SEPTEMBER
At 08.00, Alec Reader loses his life while fighting on the Somme. He is just 18 years old.

2016

15 SEPTEMBER
To mark the centenary of his death, Alec's relatives will make a pilgrimage to High Wood to remember his heroics and sacrifice in northern France.

THE SCHOOLBOYS WHO WENT TO WAR

Old Emanuel historian Daniel Kirmatzis, assisted by the Emanuel School archivist Tony Jones, has spent five years exploring the stories of Old Emanuels in the two World Wars. These are now featured in a book, published by the school itself, entitled *The Greatest Scrum That Ever Was* (above).

Daniel tells *History Of War*, "I first discovered Alec Reader's story while researching for the book. The author Neil Hanson, who had written about Alec's war experiences in *The Unknown Soldier*, put me in contact with Alec's nephew, Doug Goodman. I arranged to meet him to discuss Alec's First World War papers. As we sat in Doug's home going through the papers, I noticed a red-covered book. I pointed it out to Doug, who carefully opened it. In this copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, on an Emanuel School paste-down, were inscribed the names B. A. Reader and J. W. Chuter. I recognised the name J. W. Chuter instantly. John 'Jack' William Chuter was a year older than Alec at Emanuel. He had been a member of the school rowing team, and was killed in an aircraft accident whilst serving with the Royal Naval Air Service (R.N.A.S.) in Greece in 1917. John is buried in Mikra British Cemetery, Kalamaria. It was a spine-tingling moment discovering the book 100 years after the boys set off on their own adventures. Sadly, neither would return and both were under 20 years of age when they lost their lives in the 'Great War for Civilisation', as the inscription reads on Alec's British Victory Medal.

"Like Jack, Alec was a keen athlete, and the school magazine, *The Portcullis*, noted that Alec was a 'promising long-distance runner'. These young men are among 145 Old Emanuels who lost their life in the First World War."

Between 7-10 November 2014, Emanuel School will host a free public exhibition that will pay tribute to Old Emanuels who served in both World Wars. Further information on Daniel's book can be found on his blog at http://emanuelschoolatwar.wordpress.com.

Alec's sister Minnie (Doug's mother) reads the letters he sent home

into the possession of his nephew, Roger Goodman. Inspired by the story, Roger and I dug up citations and medals, assembled press cuttings and official correspondence, acquired photos, visited museums and records offices, and jogged memories. We read every book, and researched every document and map that we could find about the Somme

An amazing coincidence occurred on our first visit to the Public Records Office during a search for trench maps, when we spotted, open on a desk beside us, a map of High Wood showing British and German positions on the day prior to the attack

Research and tours to the Somme battlefields continued for months. We visited regimental, national and local museums in the UK, Belgium and France. We met French historians and 18 First World War veterans. Our uncle's name was found on the memorial at Thiepval dedicated to the 73,000 killed who had no known grave. Permission was gained from the owners of High Wood to explore the area, and on 15 September 2006 at 08.00, our quest ended as we stood in a shallow trench in the wood, 90 years to the hour after Alec had been killed.

And that might well have been the end of the story. But we always retained a curiosity about his pals mentioned in his letters home – and, of course, the fate of his company commander whose letter had delivered the sad news.

Later, another coincidence boosted our research. An article in *The Western Front* magazine, written by Ione Bates, recounted the military service of George Gordon Bates, a Captain in the 15th London Regiment.

A collection of personal pictures found in Alec's wallet, which was returned to his family after his death

Alec's name features on the Thiepval war memorial, which is dedicated to the 73,000 missing British and South African soldiers who fought on the Somme

It was the same man, and we are now in contact with his daughter, who has filled in many gaps in Alec's life story. Even more fascinating was the discovery that George Bates survived the continuing horrors of the war, moved to Kenya, returned to the UK in 1931 and lived until 1962

Astonishing news

As a result of this fortunate chance contact, we were put in touch with the late Jill Knight, then head of the Department of Trade and Industry's Senior Civil Service Development Unit, who had written about the exploits of the men of the Board of Trade who fought as the Civil Service Rifles in the First World War. She provided some valuable background to the troops, including the astonishing news that there was still one surviving member of the 15th London Regiment, who might be able to recall the battle for High Wood, and may even have known Alec Reader

I got to meet 104-year-old Walter Humphrys at the re-dedication of the memorial to the Civil Service Rifles when it was moved to the edge of Somerset House. There, the names of all 1,240 members of the regiment who died in the war are contained within the stone fascia

And much more was uncovered when history writer Neil Hanson started researching for his book *The Unknown Soldier: The Story Of The Missing Of The Great War*, which explores the lives of three unknown soldiers – a Briton, a German and an American. He saw Alec's letters in the Imperial War Museum, and contacted my brother for permission to use extracts in his book. We gave him all the family documents and photos for inclusion, and I was delighted to read a very detailed and lengthy history of my uncle's short life and Army experience. And best of all, *The Unknown Soldier* carried a dedication to my late brother: "In memory of Roger Goodman, another brave fighter."

Since the letters written by Alec were placed in the Imperial War Museum's archives, five books have been written about him. And two amazing events have occurred recently. While the exact time and location of Alec's death were known, a 98-year-old mystery remained:

THE TIME AND PLACE OF ALEC'S DEATH WAS SOLVED IN AN EMAIL FROM THE SON OF A SOLDIER WHO SERVED WITH HIM

how did he die? This was solved in a heart stopping email from the son of a soldier, Private L. W. Wilkinson, who had served alongside my uncle on the Western Front. The soldier had kept a diary, which had been passed down to his son. While reading *The Unknown Soldier*, Wilkinson Jnr had recognised Alec's name from his father's diary.

After he had contacted me, we began flicking through the journal. The entry for 15 September 1916 read, "Young Reader fell at the side of me with a groan, and blood rushed from a wound in his head. I just turned to glance at him, and could see that death was instantaneous. And so passed that cheerful, spirited lad to whom everything was very cosy."

The second amazing event was when I visited the National Portrait Gallery in London to view the exhibition "The Great War in Portraits". There, on a display of 40 servicemen, was a giant picture of Alec with an account of his career, and a further picture and description in a book accompanying the exhibition.

A tribute will be paid to Alec at Emanuel School on 6 November, as part of the commemorations to the pupils and staff who died in the two World Wars. There will be a panel dedicated to Alec, displaying his records, along with a well-worn copy of *Treasure Island*, which Alec borrowed from the school and carried into battle, and which I returned 97 years later.

Today, the Somme is a peaceful farming region with rolling hills, woods and neat fields. But look closely and you can still see the outline of trenches and find piles of rusty shells awaiting the bomb-disposal team. Unexploded ordnance is still ploughed up and can be extremely dangerous. Hundreds of cemeteries, memorials and museums attest that something terrible happened there a century ago.

On the edge of High Wood, where the last cavalry charge and the first tank attack took place, and where more than 8,000 soldiers lost their lives, stands a monument to the men of the 47th Division

Here, on 15 September 2016, 100 years to the hour after his death, Alec Reader will be remembered by his relatives as they stand in a corner of that little French wood.

Leaders of Men

INDIAN EMPERORS

Patricidal Princes, guilt-stricken gladiators and musical militarians… India's most-esteemed leaders didn't always follow the conventional path, reports Steve Jarratt

Modern images of India depict a teeming but peasant country, characterised by busy street vendors, swirling rivers and elephants bathing in the hot sunshine. And the country's modern military history has been relatively free of crises, too. India has supported British engagements abroad, and engaged in minor military campaigns in the likes of Sri Lanka and the Maldives, but it hasn't seen a major conflict since the Third Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.

However, things haven't always been quite so peaceful: the country has played host to the ebb and flow of empire-building since around 600BC. Its position at the confluence of east and west has also seen it come under fire from various would-be conquerors, including the Mongols of Genghis Khan and Timur, the Persian Achaemenids under Cyrus the Great, and even the Greek warrior Alexander the Great.

For much of the first two millennia, though, India's conflicts were driven by internal friction between neighbouring clans and kingdoms, led by some brilliant military and diplomatic minds – and others whose intentions were rather more sadistic. Here, *History of War* has selected some of the key figures from India's turbulent but fascinating history

AJATASATRU

RUTHLESS CONQUEROR

512-461BC

Ajatasatru was the son of Maharaja Bimbisara, one of the earliest rulers of the ancient kingdom of Magadha in north-east India. Bimbisara became head of the Haryanka dynasty in 543BC, whereupon he set about expanding his territory through marriage and conquest. However, in his own desire for power, and due to a family misunderstanding, the Prince had his father imprisoned before taking the throne for himself (Bimbisara was either murdered or committed suicide, depending on which texts you read) Ajatasatru would go on to expand the Magadha empire, defeating no fewer than 36 neighbouring states in the process, and spent 15 years battling the Licchavi republic in the Vajji region of Nepal. During these battles, he employed two new weapons: a catapult and a covered chariot with a swinging mace, which has been likened to a modern-day tank. Eventually, he would preside over a huge kingdom covering the northern tip of India, from Bengal in the east to the Punjab in the west, and north into Nepal.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ajatasatru once met Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, and is mentioned in Buddhist texts – although there is no proof that he became a follower of Buddhism.

CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA

UNIFIER OF INDIA

340-298BC

Chandragupta Maurya is influential for his founding of the Mauryan empire, and consequent unification of India into a single state. The major force in the region at the time was the Nanda empire, ruled by Dhana Nanda and located in the kingdom of Magadha in north-east India. Aiming to extend its borders, the empire had built an army comprising some 200,000 infantry and 80,000 cavalry, backed up by thousands of chariots and elephants. Under the tutelage of his advisor, Chanakya, Chandragupta assembled a band of men to rebel against the incumbent ruler. Using a mixture of bribery and deception, he incited civil unrest and overthrew Dhana Nanda to become the new King of Magadha. He then defeated the Macedonian prefects left in place by Alexander the Great, and took the Persian territories of Greek General Seleucus, before heading south to capture the Deccan Plateau, uniting the country and creating the largest empire of its day.

Getty Images

DID YOU KNOW?

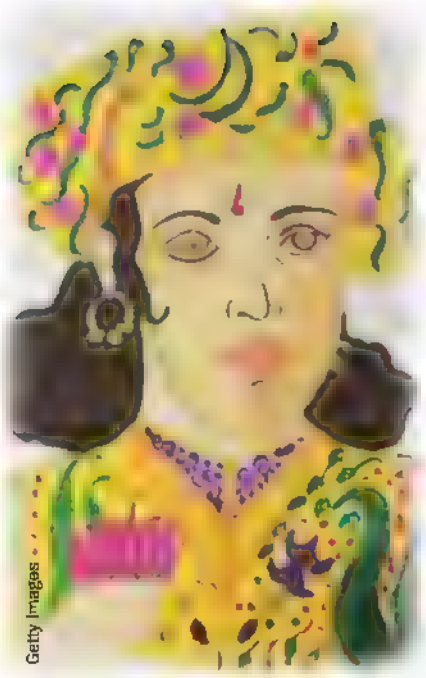
Chandragupta gave up his throne when he was 42, and became an ascetic under Jainism. He migrated south and ended his days by fasting to death.

ASHOKA

"THE FIERCE"

304-232BC

The grandson of Chandragupta, Ashoka was one of India's greatest emperors, ruling the Maurya dynasty with an empire that spread almost across the entire subcontinent. Loyal ministers helped him to the throne in favour of the rightful heir, and he's said to have been a cruel and aggressive King, gaining the nickname "Ashoka the Fierce" due to his ownership of an ornately decorated torture chamber. The Emperor waged a bitter war against Kalinga (modern-day Odisha), a feudal republic on the east coast, beginning around 261BC. This bloodiest of conflicts cost the lives of around 150,000 Kalinga warriors and 100,000 Mauryan men, and is said to have caused the Daya River to run red. The aftermath, in which Kalinga was ransacked and thousands of people were deported, caused Ashoka to reappraise his attitude towards war and, on his subsequent conversion to Buddhism, he vowed never to take another human life. Such was his adherence to the faith, he had around 84,000 *stupas* (burial mounds) built and gave millions of pieces of gold to the monastic order.



Getty Images

DID YOU KNOW?

We know of Ashoka's principles and reforms because of edicts that were carved into rocks and stone pillars. These didn't come to light until the 19th Century.

SAMUDRAGUPTA

MASTER TACTICIAN

315-000

Described by some as "India's Napoleon" (though, unlike the French emperor, he was never defeated in battle), Samudragupta was a masterful military tactician and leader of the Gupta dynasty from 335-375. Chosen above his elder brothers to succeed King Chandragupta I (not to be confused with Chandragupta Maurya), the young man immediately set out on a series of military expeditions in order to expand the Gupta empire and unify the nation. India at this stage had reverted to a patchwork of independent kingdoms, and to achieve his goal Samudragupta had to defeat every one of them, exterminating the opposing monarchs along the way. By the time of his death, he had annexed more than 20 kingdoms, and his military might had seen neighbouring states in Iran and Afghanistan become tax-paying tributaries. Samudragupta's legacy was an empire, stretching from the Himalayas to central India, that would last until the year 500. A keen patron of the arts, his reign was also responsible for fostering music, science, literature and religious freedom, and is often referred to as "the Golden Age of India".

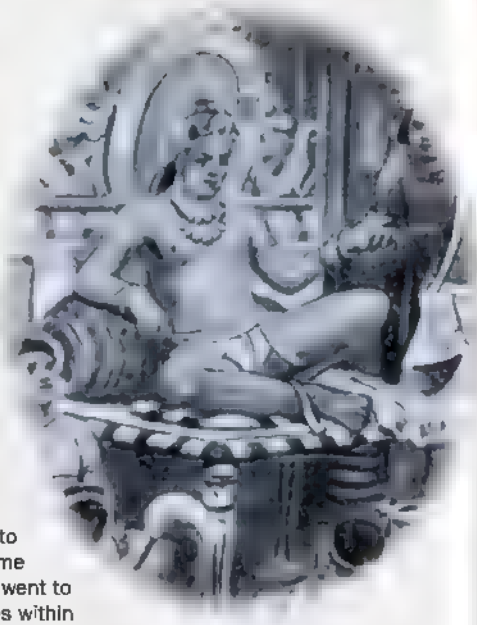
DID YOU KNOW?

Samudragupta played the lyre and, judging by his title, *Kaviraj* ("King of Poets"), was also a prolific writer – though none of his works have survived.

PULAKESI II

CHALUKYAN KING

610-642



In the 6th Century, the Chalukya dynasty ruled over southern and central India, and Pulakesi (born Ereya) came to the throne as a boy, with his uncle Mangalesa serving as regent. When Ereya was denied his birthright, he raised an army against his uncle, defeated him at the Battle of Elapattu Simbige, and ascended to the throne under the name Pulakesi. Soon after, he went to war with rebellious forces within the empire, beating the Kings Govinda and Appayika at the Bhima River in southern India. He then turned his attention to the west, defeating three kingdoms and winning a naval battle near Elephanta Island in Mumbai Harbour. Further campaigns saw him gain control of the Gujarat region in western India, and eastern Deccan, in 616. A string of victories secured southern territories, but Pulakesi met his match against the Pallava dynasty ruled by Mahendravarman. He suffered a defeat at the hands of Mahendravarman's son, and when the Pallavas laid siege to the capital city of Vatapi, Pulakesi was killed.

DID YOU KNOW?

Pulakesi was the first ruler of southern India to issue gold coins. They featured the image of a boar, the royal emblem of the Chalukya dynasty.

RAJARAJA CHOLA I

DOGGED CAMPAIGNER

947-1014

The Chola dynasty has its roots in the Tamil peoples of southern India, and dates back as far as the 3rd Century BC. When Rajaraja came to power, the kingdom faced opposition in the form of the allied powers of the Pandya and Chera kingdoms in India, and the Sinhala in Sri Lanka. The Emperor went on the offensive in 994, and it took several years of fierce fighting before he eventually conquered Pandya and Chera. Rajaraja's final resistance was removed when he sailed a large army to Sri Lanka in 993, invading and occupying the north of the island. With his men, he managed to destroy the ancient Sinhalese capital, Anuradhapura, but he could never quite bring the entire island to bear. Rajaraja then conquered Gangapadi in 999, and eventually subdued the Chalukya empire to the north-west, and the kingdom of Vengi in the south, expanding the Chola empire until it stretched from the Tungabhadra River to encompass all of southern India and the majority of Sri Lanka

DID YOU KNOW?

To ensure his lasting legacy, Rajaraja Chola had his military achievements inscribed in stone – a practice his successors also engaged in.

KRISHNADEVARAYA

NEMESIS TO THE SULTANS

1471-1529

The Vijayanagara empire of southern India reached its greatest extent under the auspices of Krishnadevaraya, the third ruler of the Tuluva dynasty. His reign is defined by its military success, driven by his tactical nous and quick thinking. His first acts were to halt the annual plunder of local towns by the Sultans of the Deccan Plateau, when his armies fought and defeated the invaders in 1509. With local feudal rulers subdued, Krishnadevaraya turned his attention to the Gajapati kingdom in the republic of Kalinga (modern-day Odisha), securing a period of peace between the two empires. However, the Deccan sultanates continued to be a threat to Krishnadevaraya's realm, and the culmination of his action was the Battle of Raichur in 1520, a turning point in southern Indian history. An army of 700,000 foot soldiers, 33,000 cavalry and 550 elephants descended on the city of Raichur to fight the King of Bijapur, Ismail Adil Shah, and his 140,000 horse and foot soldiers. After an initial rout when he lost 16,000 men, Krishnadevaraya rallied his troops to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. However, this only served to stiffen the resolve of the Muslim Sultans, who allied against and overthrew the Vijayanagara empire.

DID YOU KNOW?

Krishnadevaraya bought guns and Arabian horses from the Portuguese, who had set up a dominion in Goa, western India.

AKBAR

MUGHAL MASTERMIND

1542-1605

In the early 16th Century, the Uzbek Babur – a descendant of Timur and Genghis Khan – began his conquest of India, which led to the formation of the Mughal empire. Following in his father Hamayun's footsteps, Akbar-e-Azam (born as Jalal-ud-din Muhammad) became the third ruler of the empire in 1556, and greatly expanded the realm until it encompassed a huge swathe of the subcontinent. Akbar was a skilled military organiser and crafted the Mughal army into an effective fighting force, incorporating proper structures, employing fortifications, and innovating with the use of cannons and matchlocks (early firearms) acquired from Europe. Over the next 20 years, he would conquer the Punjab in the north-west, Rajputana in the north-east, Gujarat to the east and Bengal to the west. After dealing with domestic affairs, Akbar subdued the Indus Valley and Kashmir to secure his northern borders, while Baluchistan and Kandahar were absorbed into the empire in the early 1590s. His progressive thinking helped to integrate conquered territories by diplomatic means, and changed the state to become more liberal, introducing far reaching social reforms. The Mughal empire would prevail until the mid-19th Century.

DID YOU KNOW?

For uniting the diverse fiefdoms of India, *Time* magazine included Akbar in its list of top 25 world leaders, calling him a "canny warlord".

AURANGZEB

PERPETUAL WARLORD

1658-1717

Getty Images

When the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan fell ill in 1658, there followed a struggle for the throne between his four sons. Aurangzeb, governor of the Deccan, defeated his elder brother Dara Shikoh, occupied the capital, Agra, and took his father prisoner. The third brother, Shah Shuja, and his army were routed, while the fourth brother, Murad Bakhsh, was tricked into an alliance, then betrayed and executed. Shuja eventually fled to Arakan in modern-day Burma, and was killed by local rulers, while Dara Shikoh was betrayed by one of his Generals and he, too, was executed. As the uncontested Emperor, Aurangzeb embarked on a campaign of military expansion, and his 49-year reign is notable as a period of almost perpetual warfare. His huge armies drove north into the Punjab, and south into Bijapur and Golconda. When Bijapur refused to be a vassal state, Aurangzeb sent an army of around 50,000 men to lay siege to the fort there. By the end, he ruled over a vast empire incorporating most of India and Afghanistan, plus modern-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir and Tajikistan – a combined area that was home to well over 100 million subjects.

DID YOU KNOW?

Aurangzeb's annual tributes amounted to more than £38million – around £8billion in today's money.

SHIVAJI

THE ROGUE WHO BECAME ROYALTY

1627-1680

Shivaji Bhonsle was the son of a General, born in Pune in the west of India. Ill-educated, he took to roaming the hills along the western edge of the Deccan Plateau with a band of men from the region of Maharashtra. Shivaji and his Marathas plundered the countryside, and he gained a reputation as a warrior – it was also during his time in the hills that he began to formulate his ideas for guerrilla warfare. In 1659, the General Afzal Khan and 10,000 troops were sent by the Sultan of Bijapur to deal with Shivaji and his raiders at their fortress in Pratapgarh. A meeting was planned for Shivaji's surrender but, suspecting treachery, he wore armour beneath his clothes and bore concealed weapons, with which, it's said, he disembowelled the General. The Bijapuri troops were then defeated when a surprise attack by Shivaji's fighters killed 3,000 men. This victory signalled the start of the Maratha empire, but would bring Shivaji into conflict with the Mughal empire. The two realms would clash over the next decade, but by 1670 the Marathas had recaptured most of the territory previously lost to the Mughals. As a show of independence from the Mughals, Shivaji had himself crowned King of the Marathas in 1674.

DID YOU KNOW?

Shivaji created an organised military to protect his empire, including a standing army, intelligence units, a navy and coastal forts.

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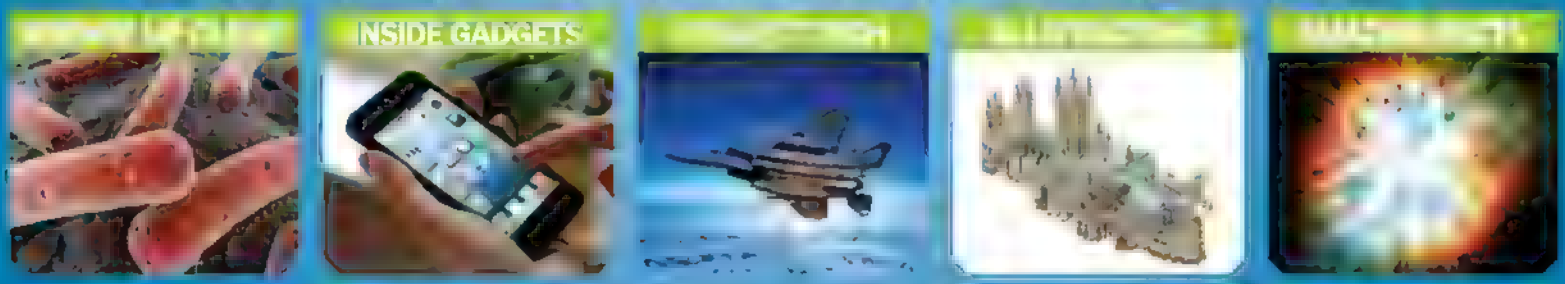

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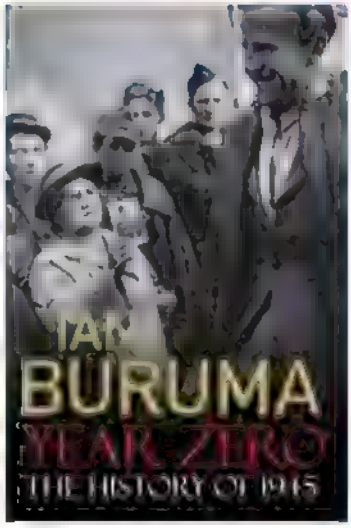
REVIEWS

History Of War casts its eye over the military-based **books, DVDs and games** that may or may not convince you to part with your cash this month

YEAR ZERO: THE HISTORY OF 1945

Ian Buruma *Atlantic Books* **RRP £25**

★★★★



If the First World War were billed as "the war to end all wars", then World War Two has come to be known as "the good war" – a conflict that saw the free world tackle the tyranny of fascism, a titanic battle between noble citizen soldiers and highly trained fanatics. Good, we are told, conquered evil in a heroic narrative that persists to this day. Sadly, as Ian Buruma points out in his excellent book *Year Zero*, history is never as simple as that.

The book explores the state of the world in the aftermath of hostilities. A world in which once-great cities were moonscapes of smoking rubble; in which millions wandered half starved or homeless, with their memories full of dark deeds witnessed or perhaps perpetrated. It was from this chaos that the victorious Allies sought to restore order, and in doing so, as Buruma reveals, committed some terrible crimes themselves. Some of these were committed unwittingly – like the GIs who killed thousands of concentration-camp victims by feeding them more food than their ravaged intestines could digest. Other crimes, meanwhile, were committed entirely cynically.

Almost as soon as the war was over, for example, many of the Allies set about restoring a grip on their colonies. Algerian Arabs, many of whom had fought alongside the French, celebrated VE Day with protests demanding equal rights. The French responded by sending in the Army. Within two months, as many as 30,000 Algerians had been slaughtered in the uprising. The vanquished survivors were then made to kneel before the French flag and beg for forgiveness. So much for conquering tyranny, eh?

The French weren't the only ones at it, either. In the Dutch East Indies, local attempts at liberation after the Japanese surrender were crushed by Dutch and British troops, causing an insurrection that would continue for four years. The British were also instrumental in restoring colonial rule in French Indochina, with the help of French Foreign Legionnaires whose ranks were swollen with former Wehrmacht troops from POW camps.

As for cleansing the defeated powers of their old regimes and establishing democracies in place of dictatorships, the Allies' attempts were also less than perfect. In Germany, they found it impossible to de-Nazify the country as they'd hoped, and in order to get it back on its feet ended up reaching out to former party members to help them.

Of course, the top Nazis were dealt with at the Nuremberg Trials, and while Buruma acknowledges this, he's quick to point out that in Japan the process of retribution was even more muddled. Struggling with a culture and language they didn't understand, the Americans botched it, with many war criminals getting away with, well, murder.

Year Zero is full of such tales, and shines a light on an often-overlooked moment of history. For all the Allies' blunders, though, Buruma concludes by stating that they did get one thing right – they didn't repeat the mistakes of the Versailles Treaty, which is where many historians believe the seed of the Second World War was originally sown. **Nick Soldinger**

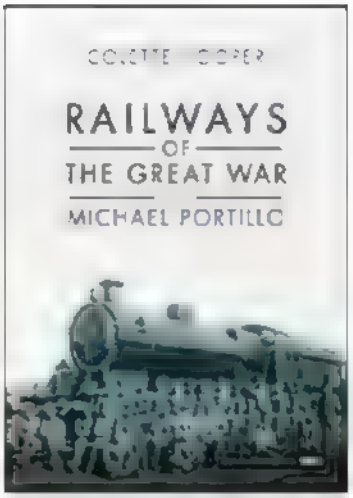
The survivors were made to kneel before the French flag and beg for forgiveness. So much for conquering tyranny, eh?

Winston Churchill waves to a jubilant crowd in Whitehall, London, on VE Day

RAILWAYS OF THE GREAT WAR WITH MICHAEL PORTILLO

Colette Hooper *Bantam Press* **RRP £11**

★★★★



As a Conservative politician – and the Defence Secretary – Michael Portillo suffered his fair share of vitriol and ridicule (who can forget the glee surrounding the loss of his Enfield Southgate seat in the 1997 General Election – an event that *Observer* readers voted as the third most memorable TV moment of all time?). But as he's drifted away from the political limelight and become more of an all-round TV celebrity, he's become infinitely more likeable, sinking his teeth into everything from medieval cuisine on *The Supersizers Eat...* to hosting famous guests on *Dinner With Portillo* (there's a phrase that might once have sent shivers down people's spines).

In yet another of his vocations, he scrubs up rather well as an historian, and he's spent the best part of the last two years presenting TV programmes about railways. His most recent production, *Railways Of The Great War*, was made to tie in with – you guessed it – the centenary of the start of that conflict. And in case you missed it, or want something more tangible to get stuck into, here's the book of the series.

While Portillo provides a lengthy foreword, in which he explains how around 68,000 soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force were transported to the south coast by train, before being shipped to the continent, it was Colette Hooper who did most of the grafting to compile this fairly hefty hardback book. Her exhaustive research must be commended, and her approachable style of writing makes what could've been an arduous subject matter genuinely enthralling (this is helped no end by a quite fantastic selection of photographs – including one of King George V taking a tour of a European battlefield by narrow-gauge railway – touching, handwritten letters, posters and other interesting documents). Hooper regales us with stories of the forgotten men of this one-great industry, men who not only provided a service in shipping soldiers to and from the frontline (or as close as they could get), but who also fought themselves, in some cases as spies.

There's a fantastic selection of photos, including one of King George V taking a battlefield tour by narrow-gauge railway

These days, we often moan about rail timetables and the perceived inefficiency of trains as they take us to and from work (or not, as the case may be), but there's plenty of evidence in this book to suggest that it wasn't always that way. Indeed, in one fascinating section, there's a passage by Great War historian Edwin Pratt, in which he claims that without the efforts of the railwaymen, the Tommies would never even have made it to the Western Front. He asks, "[Without the emergency timetables rustled up by the railway] Would it still have been possible to 'roll back the invader' and to save France, if not also to save Europe, by the end of November 1914?"

Whatever your opinion on the subject, one thing is for sure: you don't need a specialist interest in railways to appreciate what these men – and these machines – achieved during those fateful years of the First World War. And while Portillo's political career might be described by some as "hit and miss", there's no doubting that his appetite for fascinating British history is healthy. **Rebecca Painting**

24 HOURS AT WATERLOO: 18 JUNE 1815

Robert Kershaw *W. H. Allen* **RRP £25**

★★★★★

Eye witness accounts can be a minefield for historians. The memory is a slippery mistress at the best of times – how often have you disagreed with a friend on the details of what happened in the pub last Thursday, when both of you saw the same events as clear as day? When you add the march of time, the influence that other accounts might've had on warping the witnesses' sometimes distant recollections, and the effects of what would now be regarded as post traumatic stress disorder, you can never be sure of the veracity of what's being said.

However, soldier turned military historian Robert Kershaw is surely aware of these pitfalls, and his account of the Battle of Waterloo, based around 20-odd contemporary recollections from those in the thick of the action, is all the more absorbing for its first-hand colour and illuminating detail.

We're now only a few months away from the 200th anniversary of Wellington and Napoleon's fateful day of reckoning, and this is sure to be one of a stream of Waterloo-related books in publishers' pipelines. Others might have more to say about the individual visions and strategies of the respective leaders, but the use of previously unpublished accounts from rank and-file soldiers really thrusts the reader into the minute-by-minute intensity of the battle as it was felt by those fighting it.

The book is cut into hours, and it gives a riveting sense of how the whole confrontation unfolded, along with the chaotic, plans-out of the-window nature of warfare once the bullets are flying and the blades are flailing.

It's not all guts and glory, either: while there are angles such as that of Private Thomas Hasker, run through by a French lancer and left for dead, we also see the perspective of bystanders such as the pregnant Mrs Martha Deacon, looking for her wounded soldier husband and dragging three kids along with her, and local Belgian villager Jean-Baptiste Decoster, press-ganged into acting as a (rather inept) guide for Napoleon.

Kershaw also paints pen-portraits of notable figures like black soldier and escaped slave George Ross, and illuminates oft-disregarded aspects of soldiers' mindsets, such as the attitudes of British soldiers to their comrades. The Brits arrogantly believed themselves to be superior to their foreign counterparts, but only made up a third of the Allied army and would never have won the battle without the help of Johnny Foreigner.

The book gives a riveting sense of the chaotic nature of warfare once the bullets are flying and the blades are flailing

Meanwhile, some individuals featured in the book claim, Zelig-like, to have inadvertently played major roles in this most infamous of battles – one Captain insists that he accidentally initiated a disastrous French charge.

With the help of several maps to put the different voices in position on the battlefield, *24 Hours At Waterloo: 18 June 1815* paints war not just as the collective endeavour it's seen as by military strategists and romantics, but as a maelstrom of individual motivations, emotions and fateful decisions: a scary, confusing, yet sometimes heroic and exhilarating explosion of humanity just about managing to keep a grip on the cause they're fighting for. **Johnny Sharp**

LUFTWAFFE: THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN COLOUR

John Christopher *Amberley Publishing* **RRP £17.50**

★★★★

To say that the Nazis were fond of propaganda is an understatement, and it's arguable that no other regime before or since has been quite as astute at self-promotion and spin. A by-product of this was that Joseph Goebbels helped drive forward the technological side of broadcasting and film-making – and, to a certain extent, the artistic side as well (although the politics were abhorrent, the aesthetic prowess of the most famous German propagandist, Leni Riefenstahl, is much admired by cineastes to this day).

Although the underlying reasons for these advancements are rooted in a hunger for the promotion of fascism, they resulted in a unique record of the German side of the conflict. John Christopher has focused on the Luftwaffe in his new book, compiling a fascinating, full-colour pictorial history of this notorious branch of the Nazi armed forces. Photographers will argue the merits of colour versus black and white *ad infinitum*, but seeing the war depicted in the former brings it alive in a much more vivid way.

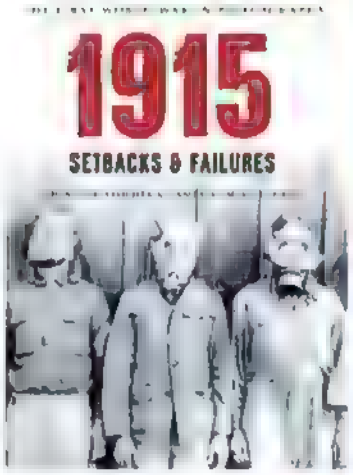
The pictures herein are the work of Die Propagandakompanie – a team of photographers assigned to document the "glorious victories" of the Wehrmacht, Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe for magazines such as *Signal* and *Der Adler* (and gloss over the defeats). They also provided visceral, first hand accounts of engagements – the description reproduced at the beginning of the book, of dive-bombing a British ship in a Junkers Ju 87 is thrilling.

The book has a surprisingly sedate feel considering what it's covering. But, to be fair, this is solely down to the nature of Die Propagandakompanie and their brief to present palatable images and omit the grizzly realities, and doesn't detract from what is an interesting and striking portrayal of the German air force. **Joseph Barnes**

1915: SETBACKS & FAILURES

John Christopher & Campbell McCutcheon *Amberley Publishing* **RRP £11**

★★★★



In the latest of Amberley's series of photo books, we're transported back to the second year of the First World War – the significance being that there wasn't supposed to be a second year. The nation had been promised that the conflict would be "over by Christmas", so, suffice to say, the mood throughout these photographs is one of apprehension and anxiety as Britain and the rest of Europe went into the unknown (the cover alone provides an ominous glimpse at the developments on the battlefield).

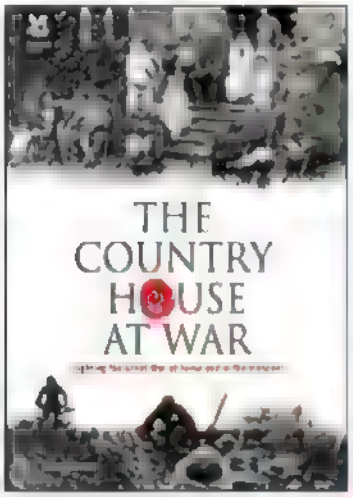
Subjects covered include Winston Churchill's disastrous Dardanelles campaign, in which thousands were massacred by Ottoman Turks; the growing use of gas on the battlefield; and the rise of the "pals" regiment, where colleagues from the same workplace would be sent to the frontline together. We also read about some of the characters who made their mark on this year, including British nurse Edith Cavell, who is famous for treating the wounded of both sides in occupied Brussels, allowing her innate humanity to override her patriotism.

Whoever sources the pictures for these books deserves a pat on the back, as the sheer volume – not to mention the quality of the reproductions – is awe-inducing. There's even a section in the middle dedicated to glossy colour maritime postcards and posters. They provide a rare glimpse of optimism in what was otherwise a very challenging year. **Rebecca Painting**

THE COUNTRY HOUSE AT WAR

Simon Greaves *National Trust Books* **RRP £14**

★★★★



Before the last shot was fired in 1918, the calamity of the First World War had affected every single life in the British Isles. It was no respecter of class or social status, murdering, maiming or sending mad the wealthy and the poor in equally large measures. Although it's not immediately obvious, one of the best-equipped organisations in the land to explore this truth is the UK's leading heritage agency, National Trust, and Simon Greaves' book *The Country House At War* is its rather clever contribution to the debate.

The premise for the book is simple: the Trust looks after hundreds of historically important buildings all over Britain, many of which were once home to born-to-rule toffs and their forelock-tugging servants. When war broke out in Europe in 1914, the toffs and the servants either marched off to the slaughter together as officer and private, or stayed at home wondering if they were about to become widows. And so began an upheaval in British social life that still echoes. More than universal suffrage, welfare reforms or right-to-buy schemes, war was to prove the greatest leveller of the 20th Century, and, as this book demonstrates so vividly, the nation's country houses were perfect microcosms of what was going on in society at large.

This splendid hardback tome is filled with letters to and from the Front, diary entries, original sketches and cartoons, as well as photographs, some of which capture the moment with terrible poignancy – a group photo of Chirk Castle's gardeners, for example, sitting in the summer sunshine of 1914, just days before Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo. The men with moustaches and flat caps look ahead smiling, with not the faintest idea of what is about to befall them.

The book is largely driven by original source material, and that's clearly played a role in shaping it, with chapters bouncing from subject to subject. We get a chapter dedicated to The War In The Air, but not one on the naval campaign, while certain battles also get cherry-picked – we read about the Gallipoli peninsula and the Somme, for example, but not Jutland or Cambrai.

Unsurprisingly, the book is at its best when dealing with life on the home front. It does a great job of documenting how women's lives changed during the conflict, showing how, as they filled in at work for the men in the trenches, a revolution in attitude to social equality and sexual liberation was fostered. It also shines a bright light on how Britain's grand estates played their part in the conflict, many transformed into opulent makeshift hospitals for the Army's two-million-plus wounded as they were shipped back from overseas; or used for military purposes, with machine-gun training and bayonet practice taking place on manicured lawns that had once hosted croquet games and garden parties.

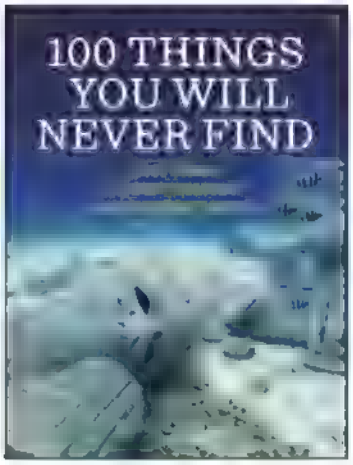
The men with moustaches and flat caps look ahead smiling, with not the faintest idea of what is about to befall them

Of course, *Downton Abbey* viewers will have already been given an insight into this eye-opening subject. But, taking nothing away from the popular ITV series, *The Country House At War* delves that bit deeper. Fascinating stuff. **Nick Soldinger**

100 THINGS YOU WILL NEVER FIND

Daniel Smith *Quercus* **RRP £10.50**

★★★★



While this could so easily have been a catalogue of those things that prove elusive on a day-to-day basis – that sock that never emerged from the washing machine, or the £20 that mysteriously disappeared from your wallet – thankfully, it's much more interesting than that. What you get is a century of "lost cities, hidden treasures and legendary quests".

The title immediately provokes curiosity – *why* will I never find them? – and even tempts the more adventurous among us to consider taking up the challenge! Well, believe me, unless your name is Indiana Jones, it's highly unlikely you're ever going to find anything in this book.

Believe me, unless your name is Indiana Jones, it's highly unlikely you're ever going to find the objects in this book

Speaking of Spielberg's intrepid explorer, one of the chapters herein focuses on the Ark of the Covenant, which is said to contain the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, and which has been missing since 600BC. As in all the cases, the chapter tells us a bit about the object, before making suggestions as to where it might be (presumably, for those ambitious types who want to start drawing a map). Chunks on would-be plane bomber D. B. Cooper, the Incas' "City of Gold" Paititi and the missing Apollo 11 tapes capture the imagination, and there's even a chapter on the formula for WD-40!

There aren't just objects, either – there's a section on Lord Lucan, as well as the identity of Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved".

But as you're reading this magazine, chances are you'll want to know what the war-related things you'll never find are. Happily, there's plenty to fascinate. You can read about the possible fate of Raoul Wallenberg, the heroic Swedish-born former businessman who saved thousands of Jews from the gas chamber, but who went missing in January 1945. There's an intriguing section on the legendary Japanese weapon *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*, which is said to have originated from within a dreaded eight-headed serpent. We learn of the mysterious disappearance of the final panels of the Bayeux Tapestry, and of Alderney residents' attempt to recreate it (which, according to the Deputy Mayor of Bayeux, was "marvellously well done"). Elsewhere, the last voyage of HMS Hussar is explored. When the 28-gun Royal Navy frigate sank off New York in 1870 during the American War of Independence, it was reckoned to be carrying a large military payroll, although this has been denied (cue the *X-Files* music).

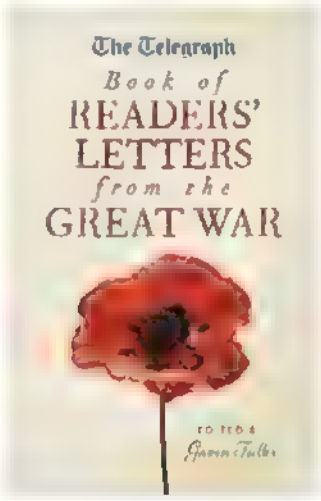
Each section is quite brief, so if you're looking for in-depth research into what fate may have befallen these 100 objects, you've come to the wrong place. For me, though, the brevity of the descriptions only serves to further activate the imagination and ramp up the intrigue (and anyway, if they knew that much about what had happened to each of the objects, they'd have found them by now).

For those of you who haven't even got the time or the inclination to manage short chapters, there's an even briefer description at the top of each section saying What It Is and Why You Won't Find It, enabling you to just shrug your shoulders and move on. If you're that person, you might be interested in another title in the series, the somewhat slack-sounding *100 Things You Will Never Do*. **Rebecca Painting**

THE TELEGRAPH BOOK OF READERS' LETTERS FROM THE GREAT WAR

Gavin Fuller (edited) *Aurum Press* **RRP £12**

★★★★★



The Daily Telegraph started the First World War. OK, that may not strictly be true, but the paper did run a controversial interview with Kaiser Wilhelm in 1908 that's said to have significantly contributed to the breakdown in Anglo-German relations prior to the conflict. It's fitting, then, that – along with re-publishing daily online editions of 100-year-old newspapers to mark the centenary of the war – *The Telegraph* has given us this, a collection of highlights from its letters page during that era.

This charming book is a direct line to a lost world, written by the newspaper's Edwardian readers, and gives us a first-hand insight into how a lot of ordinary British people felt about the war, how they thought it could be better fought, and how proud they were of the men doing the fighting.

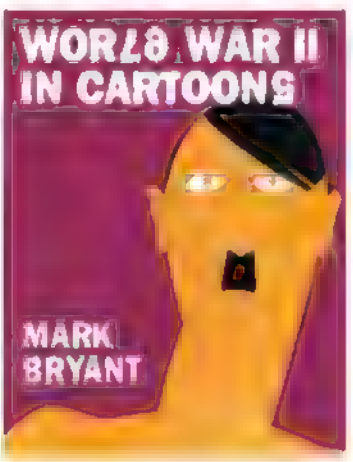
It also reveals that the so-called Blitz spirit was firmly in place more than 25 years before the term was coined, with readers writing in to express their desire to "pitch in" to help the war effort – everyone from pensioners to public schoolboys offer to do voluntary work or send warm clothing and food to the Front.

The archaic language and the subject matter can also be unintentionally hilarious. One writer, for example, complains about deteriorating theatre standards "for members of the fighting professions", who are subject to performances featuring "scantily dressed girls and songs of doubtful character" when they come home on leave! A splendid little gem of a book. **Nick Soldinger**

WORLD WAR II IN CARTOONS

Mark Bryant *Grub Street* **RRP £12**

★★★★



If you think that cartoons are too flippant a medium for depicting something as horrific as the Second World War, prepare to think again. Granted, it may not cover the key campaigns, the important victories or the devastating losses, but Mark Bryant's superb compendium of wartime strips and one-frames paints a vivid picture of the spirit and politics of that period.

Starting off with the pre-wartime era and then covering each year of the conflict, the book draws together propaganda, satire, spoofs, motivators and more from both sides. Bryant has obviously put in a huge amount of research into the subject, as the range and balance of material is superb and never feels one-sided. And nor does he shy away from showing the gross racial caricatures that occasionally crept into cartoons at this time.

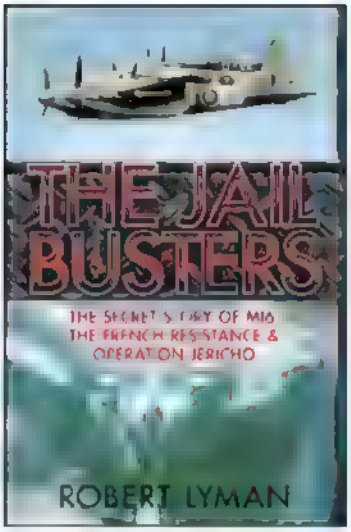
The pre-war period often feels under-represented in historical media, and so seeing the various British and European views on the rise of fascism is fascinating. People often talk of the satire boom of the Sixties as though the form didn't exist prior to this, but it's obvious that artists such as David Low and Will Dyson are very much the Steve Bells and Martin Rowsons of their day.

Far from being simply a coffee-table book to dip into now and then, *World War II In Cartoons* is a surprisingly compelling and captivating read that is hilarious and shocking in equal measures, and provides a fresh take on a familiar subject. Bryant's book is highly recommended, whether or not you're a fan of this particular medium. **Joseph Barnes**

THE JAIL BUSTERS: THE SECRET STORY OF MI6, THE FRENCH RESISTANCE & OPERATION JERICHO

Robert Lyman *Quercus* **RRP £20**

★★★



On 18 February 1944, 18 RAF Mosquitoes led by Group Captain Percy Charles "Pick" Pickard took off in severe, blizzard conditions from their base in Hertfordshire. Their target was Amiens Prison in the Somme Valley, over 200 miles away, and weather conditions were so bad that the decision to launch the raid had been made just two hours before to avoid being detected by German radar. The wooden Mosquitoes were built for speed. In close formation, they skimmed the grey waters towards the French coast, with 500lb bomb loads in their bellies, at up to 350mph.

Within 15 minutes of reaching German-occupied France, Pickard's raiders were in sight of their target. As planned, they came in low and slow to make sure their bombing was as precise as it could be. The planes' payloads had even been fitted with delayed fuses to ensure that they didn't blow up the men who were dropping them. Within minutes, the prison walls were reduced to rubble, buildings were ablaze and the Mosquito crews knew they had pulled off one of the most daring raids of the Second World War.

There are so many glaring gaps in the official version of the story, yet it's this version that Lyman props up in his book

Things got off to a bad start for the squadron. The raid was top secret and strict radio silence had to be maintained. In the snow, the air crews struggled to maintain visual contact with one another and, before long, four of the Mosquitoes returned to base.

The other 14 planes pushed on, however, out over the English Channel, flying as low as 30 feet

Militarily, Operation Jericho – as it was known – was hailed as a success. The skill of the flying and the accuracy of the bombing were applauded, while the selfless heroism of Pickard, who was tragically killed in the raid, was declared unquestionable. What was questionable, however, and remains so to this day, was the real reason the raid was carried out in the first place.

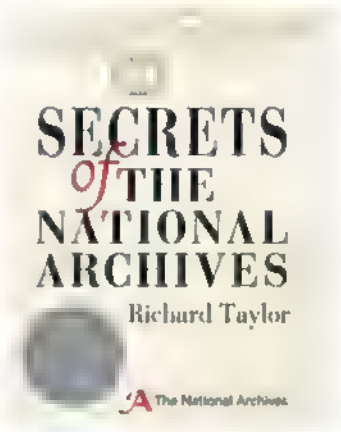
The official line was that Operation Jericho was undertaken to free incarcerated French resistance fighters from the Gestapo's clutches. But for many, this explanation doesn't stack up. Firstly, there's the suspicious shortage of official documentation to support the claim. Secondly, there's the fact that the raid killed more inmates (over a hundred) than it liberated (a few dozen). Finally, there's the lack of an adequate answer to the question, "Why Amiens Prison in particular?"

There are so many glaring gaps in the official version of the story, and yet it's this version that Robert Lyman earnestly props up throughout his book, with much of it devoted to an account of the local resistance movement that apparently asked MI6 to organise the raid, rather than the raid itself. All of which is a shame, because this is a great tale of derring-do that's been swathed in mystery for 70 years. The Official Secrets Act no doubt holds the key – and that means it may well be another 30 years before any of us discover the truth. **Nick Soldinger**

SECRETS OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Richard Taylor *Ebury Press* **RRP £16**

★★★★★



The National Archives at Kew holds one of the most extraordinary collections of documents in the world. This book by Richard Taylor puts together a number of those documents, covering every era, from the 11th Century to modern times.

The records picked are, at turns, world-changing, heartbreaking and illuminating. From the Magna Carta, still referred to by governments today, through the scrawled fury at a friend's treachery in a letter by Richard III, to the telegrams received from RMS Titanic, here you are looking at the events as they happened.

Taylor supports each of the documents with explanations of the story behind it, and fills you in with what happened next. Take, for instance, the letters captured in the Anglo-Dutch Wars, seized by the British Navy in 1803. They included, Taylor reveals, a leather bound notebook containing seeds from China. Two hundred years later, the seeds were sent to nearby Kew Gardens, where some were germinated successfully!

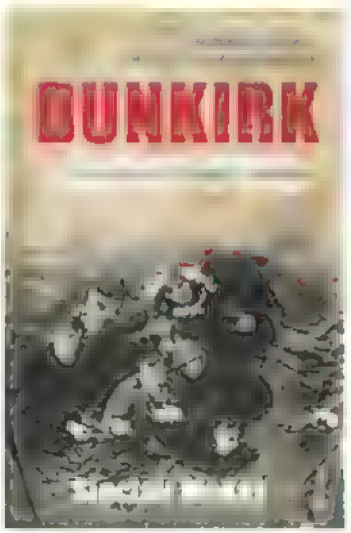
The documents are often exciting eye-witness accounts – such as the report of battle from Rorke's Drift. Taylor not only brings to life this tale of courage, in which barely a hundred British soldiers fought off almost 4,000 Zulus, he also puts it into historical context. He notes that the enthusiastic reaction of the press and the 11 Victoria Crosses awarded provided a potent distraction from the fact that a few days previously, the British Army had undertaken an illegal invasion and suffered a humiliating defeat!

These fascinating documents and Taylor's commentary are a winning combination – the result is an informative and entertaining romp through history. **Rebecca Painting**

DUNKIRK

Sinclair McKay *Aurum Press* **RRP £20**

★★★★★



Along with D-Day and Pearl Harbor, Dunkirk is one of those names you first hear when you're at school, and yet, as I picked up a copy of Sinclair McKay's thick tome, I was surprised at how little I actually knew about this momentous event in military history.

No matter, because McKay has done an excellent job of educating. His book, broken down into date-related chapters, tells the complete story of the Dunkirk evacuation when, in the face of an overwhelming German onslaught, nearly 350,000 British, French and Belgian troops were rescued from the beaches of northern France by a veritable motley-crew flotilla of sea craft. As you'd hope, McKay gives us some context, book-ending the evacuation itself with the story of how those starving and desperate men came to be in that situation in the first place, and, later, both the immediate aftermath of the event and how it's remembered today. McKay's writing style is a joy to read, striking the perfect balance between textbook factual and pulp-fiction romantic, and he makes sure to stuff the narrative with plenty of first-hand accounts, not to mention some insight into how the folks at home perceived what was happening over the Channel.

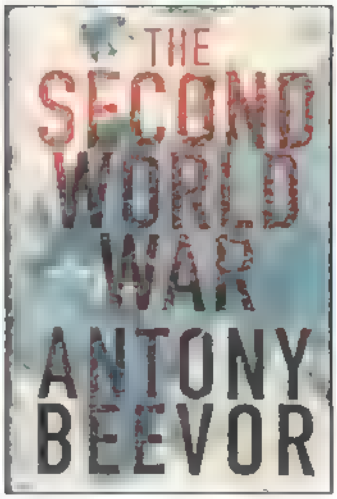
There's also a selection of photographs, depicting everything from Ministry of Information posters to the evacuation itself to a picture of those Dunkirk boats that showed up at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012.

A thoroughly enjoyable, yet exhausting and tragic, read. Sitting on the beach will never be the same again. **Rebecca Painting**

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Antony Beevor *Phoenix* **RRP £18.99**

★★★★



I'll admit it now: Antony Beevor is the very reason I wanted to start writing about history after I left university. His books *Stalingrad* and *Berlin: The Downfall 1945* are towering epics that not only read like classic literature, but demonstrate a) how much of human history is forged in war by the machinations of the powerful; and b) how war affects the little guy, who gets grabbed from his daily life to go and murder or get murdered on their behalf.

How do you write a single book that captures all of that tragedy adequately? Beevor proves here that you can't

As a writer, Beevor reminds me of Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens and another hero of mine, David Simon, who was the brains behind American TV crime drama *The Wire* – AKA The Greatest TV Series Ever Made™. Like those men, Beevor has a canny knack of grasping the big picture, and tells the story from top to bottom – from scheming politician to hapless foot soldier. With voices from each end of the social spectrum meticulously woven into his epic narratives, he has almost single-handedly made history sexy, and it's justifiably turned him into an international best seller.

Commercially, *The Second World War* – re-published two years after its original release, possibly to co-incide with the 75th anniversary of the start of the conflict – is one of Beevor's most successful books, but for this particular fan-boy it has to be one of his less-satisfying reads. Why? Because the costliest, most destructive and far-reaching conflict our species has ever known is not one that can be easily contained in a single narrative (albeit a very long one). This was a war, after all, that introduced Blitzkrieg, Pearl Harbor, Stalingrad, D-Day, Dresden, Midway, Hiroshima and Auschwitz into our lexicon. And all in the space of six short years.

How do you a write a single book that captures all of that tragedy adequately? If anything, Beevor – who's undoubtedly amongst the very best historians we've got – proves with this book that you can't. He proves, in fact, that the Second World War is just a name we give to a proliferation of violence on a scale never before witnessed on our planet. A catch-all that we use to try to make sense of something that proved that, despite all of our fine books and buildings, artworks and arias, an animalistic desire to destroy still lurks behind the masks of civilised men. What happened on the battlefields, in the gas ovens and the irradiated cities of Europe, of Africa, of Asia, of North and South America, is something humanity will probably never be able to neatly put in a box and tie up with string.

Not that Beevor's attempt to do so isn't a fascinating read; it's just that his usual ability to entertain while he informs is overwhelmed by the vastness of his subject matter. Despite clocking in at nearly 1,000 pages (let's just say you won't get through it on your Tube journey to work), there just isn't enough space for him to give every aspect of the conflict the true Beevor treatment.

The result is an unbalanced masterpiece that turns parts of the conflict (particularly the bloody engagements that were fought on the Eastern Front) up to 11, while other seismic events like the Manhattan Project tend to get lost in the mix. **Nick Soldinger**

PRISONER OF WAR

Dir: Luke Moran *4Digital Media* **RRP £7**

★★★

On the surface, this looks like your typical glossy Hollywood war movie. A plucky, all-American kid leaves behind his sweetheart and ships out to Iraq. With him is a motley unit of hyped-up, colourful characters, all naïve to the brutal reality of war.

From there, however, the story turns into an interesting military drama, exploring things that you wouldn't normally find in a glossy Hollywood war movie, but are undoubtedly part and parcel for real-life soldiers: boredom, loneliness, horrendous living conditions, the feeling of relief when a fellow soldier dies because it's not you: horrific ordeals that can't be left in the warzone.

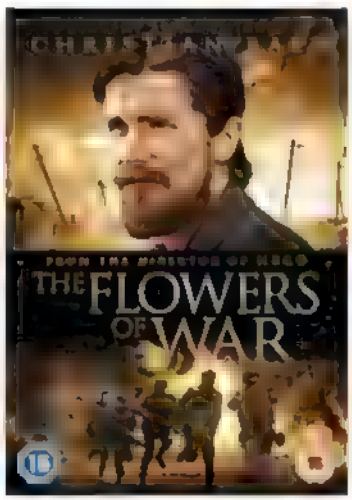
As the story develops and our plucky kid becomes a military police prison guard, the film does have something more in common with the standard Hollywood fare – namely, its tendency to favour dramatic licence over historical accuracy. This is, after all, the story of Abu Ghraib, the notorious Iraq jail where US military police committed horrendous acts of torture upon Iraqi prisoners. Instead of a truthful portrayal of what happened, writer/director/star Luke Moran weaves a dramatic story around the events as his protagonist Jack finds himself befriending an inmate of the prison.

For some people, *Prisoner Of War* will be an interesting watch, as it delves into the largely unchartered territory of the lone soldier's personal battle with his own emotions. For others, it will be little more than a means of excusing appalling behaviour on the part of the US forces. Either way, it's a controversial portrayal of a controversial event. **Tom Fordy**

THE FLOWERS OF WAR

Dir: Zhang Yimou *Revolver Entertainment* **RRP £6.99**

★★★★



Christian Bale has long fancied himself as one of the dramatic heavyweights. In an effort to cement his credentials, he's taken on a role that might later be seen as his very own Oskar Schindler, set against the backdrop of one of China's most grisly events – "the Rape of Nanking".

Bale plays hard-drinking American John, who's trapped in Nanking when the Japanese attack in 1937. Taking refuge in a cathedral, he poses as a priest and sweet talks the Japanese invaders. All the while, he finds himself as the reluctant guardian of a convent of virginal schoolgirls, upon whom the Japanese seek to commit despicable sexual abuse.

Bale's journey from selfish drunk to righteous defender forms the central thread of the story – and his performance is typically solid – but the battle and action sequences prove so powerful and thrilling, they unquestionably take centre stage. It's a testament to Chinese director Zhang Yimou, who before this was perhaps best known as the director of the Beijing Olympic ceremonies (the Chinese Danny Boyle, perhaps).

Though essentially a book adaptation, there are elements of truth to the story: the Americans in China during the invasion did indeed attempt to protect the Chinese from violence and sexual abuse. For western audiences, it's a convenient entry point to a story that's not widely known – essentially, a siege and occupation that resulted in the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people. Consequently, it's tense, brutal and occasionally tender stuff. **Tom Fordy**

THE BRITISH HOME FRONT: FIRST WORLD WAR 1914-1918

Dir: N/A *Essential Music* **RRP £11.75**

★★★★★

Over two hours' worth of silent newsreels isn't everyone's idea of fun, but this DVD is a mesmerising journey through arguably the most turbulent period of modern British history – 1914-18. The collage of clips takes us chronologically through those troubled times, showing us life before, during and after the calamitous campaigns of the Western Front.

We start in Edwardian Britain – a prosperous, confident-looking country – just as war is declared. Cue crowds in the streets waving their hats, footage of chaps queuing to be fitted for uniforms. You can almost lip-read the recruiting Sergeant telling them it'll all be over by Christmas... and then the DVD changes gear.

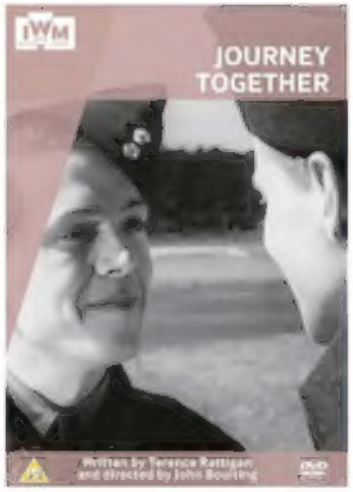
Britain was clearly in meltdown during these years. Sure, the folks in the footage all look frightfully civilised in their country-home attire, but many are in a constant state of protest – for the war, against the war, for prohibition, against the pacifists, anti-German, pro-Sinn Féin... it's a hypnotic flicker of chaos.

The footage also suggests the profoundly different effect the war had on the genders. For women, it appears liberating, even if freedom came in the form of hard graft in their new jobs. For the men, it was the opposite. As the film goes on and conscription kicks in, they stop waving their hats. Those who do make it back from France are broken – blind, missing limbs or convulsing from shellshock. "Never such innocence again," was poet Philip Larkin's verdict on the conflict. Amen to that. **Nick Soldinger**

JOURNEY TOGETHER

Dir: John Boulting
Simply Media **RRP £12.99**

★★★★☆



First released in 1945, *Journey Together* is a Second World War film about RAF Bomber Command, starring a so-young-he's-got-pimples Richard Attenborough, and a cast made up almost entirely of serving military personnel. Directed by John Boulting and written by Terence Rattigan, it's a movie that's as entertaining as it is curious, so rich is it in clues about our past.

It tells the story of working-class lad David Wilton (Attenborough), who joins the RAF hoping to become a pilot. When that dream nose-dives, he reluctantly retrains as a navigator – a role that is, as the film goes to great lengths to point out, just as vital as that of a pilot.

Part drama-documentary, part feature film, but in reality a period propaganda flick by the RAF Film Unit, Wilton's journey takes him from ground crew, via flight training in California, where he encounters paternal US instructor Dean McWilliams (played by acting legend Edward G Robinson, who apparently waived his fee), to a bombing raid over Berlin, which feels so claustrophobic you can almost smell the air fuel and smoke.

The film's climax, which sees Wilton's Lancaster struggling home shot to pieces, with a wounded George Cole (remember him?) aboard, is an utterly compelling insight into life inside the fuselage of an RAF bomber during those terrible years. Does Wilton get the air crew home, or does the Channel swallow them before their battered plane can reach the safe shores of Blighty? Grab a copy, make a cuppa and find out. *Journey Together* is ideal viewing for a rain-wet autumn afternoon. **Nick Soldinger**

IRONCLAD & IRONCLAD 2: BATTLE FOR BLOOD

Dir: Jonathan English *Warner Home Video* **RRP £20**

★★★☆☆

The "historical" epic *Ironclad* is way more enjoyable than it has any right to be, given that it plays extremely fast and loose with the historical truth, and is, effectively, a well-presented B-movie with a feel that is part-European, part-sub-*Game Of Thrones* (a fact that is bolstered by the presence of *GOT* veterans Charles Dance and Mackenzie Crook).

Their presence hints at a strong cast and, indeed, the film also manages to call upon the estimable talents of Paul Giamatti (*Saving Private Ryan*), who chews up the scenery as King John, James Purefoy (*Rome*), Brian Cox, Jason Flemyng and Derek Jacobi. *Transformers*' Megan Fox was also penned in for a role, but one can only assume that the bloody fun – detailing the siege of Rochester Castle by King John in 1215 – benefits from the absence of one so wooden.

There's no mistaking that John, commanding an army of Danish mercenaries, is the bad guy in all of this, with the Knights Templar being the heroes, and the film is very much a series of impressive combat scenes, both large and small in scale, loosely connected by plot points that scarcely seem to matter. And the seriousness of the film is hardly helped by the fact that the Danes are as cartoonish in their savagery as the King who hires them. But it's all good, gory fun if you like this kind of thing.

The sequel boasts yet more *Game Of Thrones* veterans (chiefly Roxanne McKee and Michelle Fairley) but packs in only a fraction of the original film's verve and evident budget. **Pete Cashmore**

NUCLEAR WAR

Android/IPhone app *GameZen* **Free**

★★★★★

I think it's fair to say that when it comes to scale and ambition, this is the app of the two reviewed this month that packs more (literal) bang for your buck – although it feels a bit of a queasy pleasure, given that the real world seems to be teetering perilously close to the particular military phenomenon mentioned in the title.

Still, in the spirit of partying in the shadow of the bomb, there's so much to be enjoyed here, as you seek to actively engage in global hostility with enemy nations, gathering the resources you need to become a force in the nuclear power struggle, and then using said force. There are a whole load of options available to test your scheming abilities, as you attempt to gather online allies who will fight your corner and, more crucially, not blow you up. And (if this matters in a game that's all about destruction) it looks pretty terrific, too. A game where you'll go out with a bang – again, literally. **Pete Cashmore**

BATTLESHIP WAR

Android/IPhone app *WhiteBigRabbit* **£1.49**

★★★★☆

Ever since the days of board games, the particular kind of strategy and cunning necessary to prevail in oceanic warfare has fascinated gamers – not that we're suggesting that the original classic board game has all that much to do with sea-based warfare. This app is rather more hands-on, and involves navigation and handiness with a pivoting gun turret.

You're cast out into the briny sea in one of thousands of war vessels, and your task is to blow them out of the water before they do the same to you. One could argue that the controls are tricky, but then we'd imagine that this is much like it would actually be. So yes, a fuss to navigate at first, but fun once you start slamming artillery into enemy hulls. **Pete Cashmore**

WAR in NUMBERS
THE FALKLANDS CONFLICT

Facts and figures from the 1982 war between **Britain and Argentina**

2

▲ The number of days after ARA General Belgrano's sinking that Argentina retaliated by sinking HMS Sheffield. Twenty members of the British ship's crew were killed.

74

▲ The number of days the conflict lasted. It began on 2 April 1982 with Argentina's invasion of the Falklands, and ended with its surrender on 14 June 1982.

25 THOUSAND

▲ The approximate number of landmines the Argentines planted on the Falkland Islands to stop the British from landing there.

Shutterstock

255

◀ The number of British personnel killed during the war. Argentine dead totalled 649, while three Falkland Islanders lost their lives.

25,948

▲ The number of British armed-forces personnel who served during the Falklands campaign.

10

◀ The number of British personnel rescued, on 8 June 1982, from the burning bowels of HMS Sir Galahad by Chiu Yiu-Nam, a Hong Kong seaman working on the vessel. The ship had been hit by Argentine planes. Chiu was later awarded the George Cross.

54

▲ There were no photographs from the first 54 days of the conflict. The UK press therefore filled their pages with human-interest stories.

7,500

▲ The number of miles the Falklands are from the British Isles. They are 400 miles from South America.

1,335

◀ The number of Falklands veterans who have died since the war ended.

323

◀ The number of Argentines killed when ARA General Belgrano was sunk by British submarine HMS Conqueror on 2 May 1982. Over 700 men were rescued.

Getty Images

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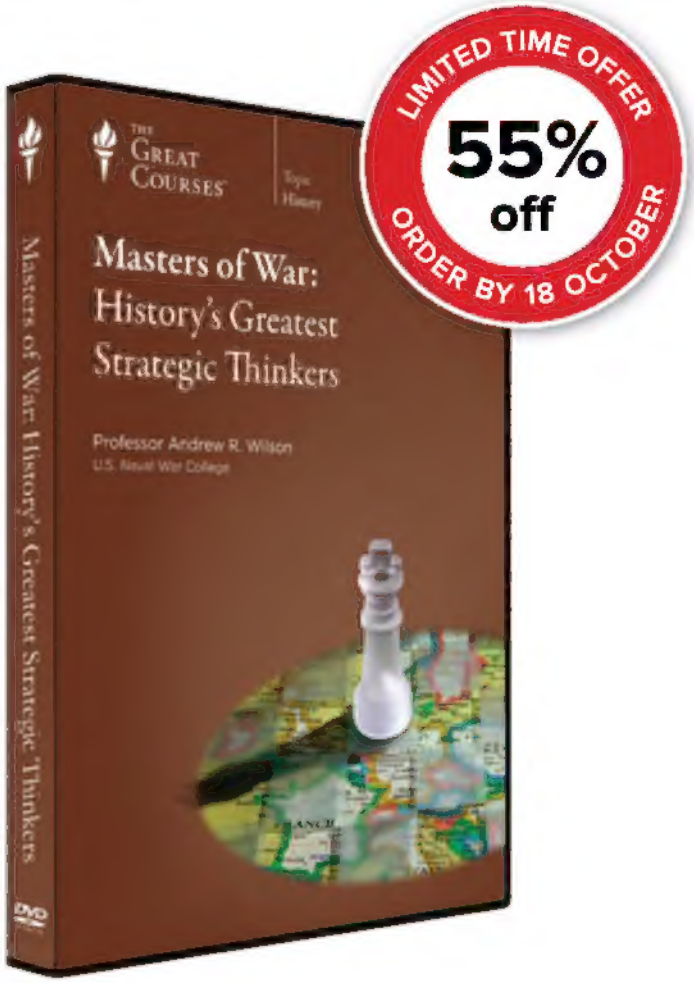

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